The Fugitive Freshman

RALPH D. PAINE

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

THE FUGITIVE FRESHMAN

"THAT STEAMER HAS *GOT* TO KNOW WE'RE HERE AND NEEDIN' HER AWFUL BAD"

THE FUGITIVE FRESHMAN

BY

RALPH D. PAINE

Author of "College Years," "The Head Coach," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

E. DALTON STEVENS

NEW YORK

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THE FUGITIVE FRESHMAN

CHAPTER I

WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS

Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr., had been overtaken by a fit of the blackest melancholy. It was more painful and serious than the common variety of undergraduate "grouch," and although this rattle-pated Freshman deserved no end of scolding, and it was a pity that he had grown too tall to be thoroughly spanked, yet his abysmal dejection might have moved even a stranger to sympathy. Perhaps it is better to paint him at his worst in the very beginning of this story and have done with it. He is introduced to your notice as a very shabby hero, indeed, and he must not be allowed to sail under false colors. This warning is advisable at the outset because young Tom Meserve had a taking way with him, and his shortcomings were so numerous that any sympathy whatever would be totally misplaced.

Let it therefore be set down that he was in his second Freshman year in the large and ancient university of Elmsford, though I doubt whether he

would have had the grace to blush at making so shameful a confession as this. Thomas was a class heirloom, so to speak, who had come a cropper at the barrier of final examinations in his first Freshman year and was left behind by the friends who had entered college with him. This most unpleasant news, that he had "flunked" without extenuating circumstances, was received by his father with a considerable display of temper and a series of ultimatums which the hapless youth shuddered to recall. Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr., had permitted him to return to Elmsford for another start only after such promises of shining behavior as, in truth, could reasonably be expected of an archangel, a valedictorian, and a George Washington rolled into one.

The class from which young Thomas Meserve was thus compelled to separate himself by a cold-blooded decree of the faculty, sincerely mourned his loss, while the succeeding mob of Freshmen among whom he was enrolled welcomed him joyfully. This perennial popularity in the undergraduate world atoned for the clouded nature of his status at home. He accepted it as one of the soundest of maxims that "a man finds his level on the campus, which takes him for what he is worth." It logically follows, therefore, that inasmuch as he continued to enjoy the affection and esteem of his fellows, there must have

been something wrong with the parental judgment, or so it appeared to the ingenuous mind of Thomas.

To do him justice, he was a youth of the most excellent intentions, from which, however, the fuses must have been withdrawn; for they missed fire on all occasions. As for good resolutions, he made more of them and subjected them to less wear-and-tear than any other man in his class. Lovable, generous, continually in hot water, he was "plain footless" in the slang of the campus, and the odds against his lasting long enough at Elmsford to win a diploma were almost prohibitive. He played base-ball uncommonly well, and pitched for both his Freshman nines; sang a rattling good song, handled a billiard cue like a wizard; and when not in training showed a truly heroic ability to go without sleep and turn up at chapel fresh and fit.

Concerning his scholarship there is so little to say that I hesitate even to mention it. Thomas was neither dull nor lazy, but there were so many campus activities that keenly interested him and such a host of friends to be interviewed in all manner of important conferences by day and night, that study and recitation hours were dreadfully in the way. He was always on the point of "bracing up and grinding like the very dickens," but, alas, this was a movable point which was shifted from one day to the next.

If his record in the class-rooms was indifferent,

the financial helplessness of this sad specimen of an Elmsford Freshman was positively appalling. At the end of his first year in college his debts had been paid by his father, who became purple of countenance as he commanded his heir, in a farewell edict, to live within his income, or without it; an epigram worthy of a more appreciative audience. The heir aforesaid honestly meant to obey to the letter, and even began to keep a detailed account of daily expenditures, which was not forgotten and discarded for a whole fortnight.

Now it so happened that Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr., was one of the old-fashioned American merchants and capitalists who had grown rich by means of hard work, canny investments, and a frugal habit of outlay. When he sent his boy to college he expected him to declare dividends in the form of an education, with due regard to operating expenses, for which reason young Thomas found himself in the awkward position of a rich man's son with a poor man's income. Unfortunately he did not in the least resemble his father, but seemed to hark back to an earlier generation of Meserves who had been notable for a headlong and spendthrift temperament.

This afflicted youth sat at a disorderly desk by a dormitory window that overlooked the populous, busy campus. The season of the year was just be-

twixt spring-time and summer. The long vacation was not far distant and the air was sweet and bright and warm, inviting undergraduates to forsake the stuffy, stupid class-rooms and loaf and gossip in the shade. The Seniors were playing "nigger baby" near their segment of the fence, as was the hoary custom, and their joyous clamor was varied by an occasional wail of anguish as the stinging missile of a ball bombarded in a tender spot some victim of the hazards of the game. From open windows, here and there, cheery young men shouted at each other like so many chanticleers crowing in a poultry-yard.

This pleasant, animated scene had no charm for the gloomy soul of Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr. In the course of a woe-begone soliloquy he said to himself:

"I cannot understand how in the world I ever got into the hole again. It must have been fine growing weather for debts this year, and I have a lusty second crop, and no mistake. Why do the robbers give me credit? It is a conspiracy to ruin me. I dare not put my troubles on paper and snatch a bird's-eye view of the horrible total. But, confound it, I suppose I really ought to."

Thereupon, with a whimsical recollection of the procedure of Robinson Crusoe when in a dire plight, he set about jutting down a schedule of his misfortunes, financial and otherwise. It was as well to

look the situation in the face, if one were bent on making himself as miserable as possible. With conscientious and painstaking earnestness, therefore, Thomas began to take account of stock in this fashion:

"(1) Mighty slim chance of passing final exams and making the Sophomore class next year. My stand in Latin and mathematics has been simply rotten.

"(2) Number of marks for cutting recitations and chapel and going out of town is so near the limit that I am lucky if I can stave off being suspended between now and summer.

"(3) The Dean is sore on me about that class supper. I did not paint old Franklin's statue sky blue, but he blames me for every fool ruction that breaks loose in the Freshman ranks."

Thomas paused, glowered at his inky fingers, rubbed his head, and turned to face the door. His room-mate, Howard Craig, had entered and was regarding him with a mirthful smile.

"Why so sad and mussed up?" was the greeting. "Nobody expects our little Tommy Bright-eyes to be caught in the act of nursing a grouch."

"Don't josh me, Howard," wailed the other. "I am full of real troubles. This game of figuring up where I stand is no merry jest. Robinson Crusoe chalked down his calamities, and then footed up

what he had to be thankful for, and struck a balance that was all to the good. But I am totally shy any cheering features. It is all one-sided. Nothing but desolation and tragedy. My affairs are so complicated that there is positively no way of beating them."

"What have you been doing to that smudgy piece of paper? Let me see it," demanded Craig, who was a solid, matter-of-fact person for his years. "U-m-m, how foolish! You knew all this without writing it down. Just playing a game with yourself, are you? I see nothing here about the money you owe. Don't you intend to complete this pathetic page of English prose composition?"

"I was going to do it, Howard, but it scares me to think of looking at the figures. When I get through, there will be nothing left for me but to apply for a receiver. It is certainly queer about money. I get my check from home the first of every month and I sort of automatically swell up and feel rich for a week or so. And it is the easiest, most natural thing to lend a few dollars here and there to fellows who happen to be broke. And it is no fun to go to the theatre alone, and so I buy a box. I eat at 'Gus' Traeger's café for a few days, blowing a few friends off to dinner and so on, and then—presto!—instead of living on the fat of the land I am munching tripe and sandwiches at Billy's lunch wagon. I don't seem to be steady-gaited."

"That is quite the sanest diagnosis I ever heard you make of yourself," replied Craig. "But you are drawing it mild, at that. How about those flying trips to New York, and other imitations of the prodigal son when he was outward bound, eh, Tommy?"

"I sort of act before I think," penitently remarked Thomas with a wan smile. "I guess I have been travelling with the wrong crowd. I ought to steer clear of the fellows with fat allowances."

"I have heard this kind of post-mortem oration a good many times," said Craig. "Now get down to business. Your present symptoms are almost hopeful. Take that absurd sheet of paper, young Robinson Crusoe, and put your debts down one by one."

"I wish I could have a desert island of my own, Howard. Well, here goes. I owe Abe Hamburger two hundred, the greasy old scoundrel. That one item is enough to give me nervous prostration. He has my notes, of course."

"And how did you get into his clutches?" was the stern query.

"I lost some of it backing my opinion, before the last foot-ball game. You wouldn't have me a paper sport, would you, Howard? College spirit comes high."

"And it is costing you ten per cent a month in interest, you tow-headed fool," chided Craig in most

unsympathetic accents. "Hamburger is a crafty money-lender and he gave you the cash because he knows your father has oodles of coin and will have to settle if you don't, because you are a minor. Twenty dollars a month you are dropping into a rat-hole. All right. What next?"

"That dinner I gave at Gus Traeger's on my birthday. Sixty-seven dollars is what the bill looks like to me. I hadn't intended to invite so many fellows, but they sort of drifted in, don't you know. And we certainly had a good time."

"And this is a case of, oh, what a difference in the morning, Thomas. Have you any more exhibits as bad as these?"

"Benson, the Chapel Street tailor, claims that I owe him for a hundred and forty dollars worth of clothes. I guess he is right."

"What did you do with them?" coldly demanded the room-mate. "Did you eat them?"

"No, I sold them to Mose Einstein, second-handed, to raise cash for the bare necessities of life—to keep body and soul together, old man. Then, of course, I had to order more clothes from Benson. They get you going and coming. There is no escape."

"Not for children and idiots. Let's hear the worst," said Craig, who was keeping track of the items with his own pencil and paper while Thomas breathed hard as he wrestled with the pen at his

desk and made the entries beneath the memoranda which described his precarious relations with the faculty.

"Oh, I am a month behind with my bills at the eating club, and there is a furniture man who is getting very restless, fairly rude, and some shoes and shirts and a few books, not many, and——"

"Put them all down, names and exact amounts," commanded Craig. "And don't try to cover up your tracks, Tommy. I am sorry I didn't have sense enough to come to the rescue long ago, but I had no idea you were so tangled up. I presume that your father would be pretty hot under the collar if he got wind of it."

"Hot? He would blow up with a report that would shake the county," cried Thomas. "He ought to have sent a business manager to college with me. No joking, old man. This is my last chance. If I cannot get matters straightened out somehow, he will yank me from college by the back of the neck and put me to work in his horse-shoe nail factory. Any fate but that. I'm not sure that he would do that much for me. I have certainly tried his temper and strained his patience, and he is strictly orthodox when it comes to handling the spoiled child. Honestly, he has me scared this time."

Craig frowned and studied the harrowing total of liabilities. He was very fond of his flighty room-

mate and was loath to think of losing him by the academic wayside. He distrusted the good intentions of the genial, irresponsible Thomas, however, and did not know how to help him until an idea popped into his mind which he was quick to announce.

"A business manager! You have hit the nail on the head. Perhaps we had better call it a receivership under the circumstances. If you like, I am willing to take charge of your affairs until you are all square, or until you finish college, for that matter. We don't want to lose you, and I feel sure that your father will stand no more nonsense. What do you say?"

The notion of a receivership tickled the fancy of Thomas and he replied with sudden elation:

"Simply great! It is awfully good of you to take all this trouble on your hands, and I promise to be as meek as Moses. Any port in a storm. When shall we begin? I feel better already."

"You must turn over your allowance checks to me," said Craig, with never a smile. "I handle your income absolutely or I refuse to pull you out of the pit. One dollar a week as spending money is to be your limit. And if you borrow one cent from anybody I will beat you half to death, and I am man enough to do it. You must quit your expensive eating club and come around to my humble joint. There is a saving of four dollars a week. As for

your debts, I shall spread the surplus around and keep your creditors appeased. With Abe Hamburger I shall make some sort of a compromise and bluff him into cutting down his interest, and pay him back fifty dollars at a time. All those people will let you alone over the summer vacation if they know that you are honestly letting me run your accounts. Now, Thomas, you are going to lead the simple life. And you are going to pass your examinations. I will sit up nights to tutor you. Brace up and come along to the field for base-ball practice."

Thomas Winthrop Meserve was jubilant beyond words. He had been delivered from all the snares and pitfalls. His confidence in sturdy Howard Craig was implicit, and as they walked across the campus, arm in arm, the culprit was loud in protestations of gratitude and eloquent with promises of reform. While they waited for a street-car to the athletic field, Thomas uttered an ejaculation of dismay and blurted:

"I left that list of my troubles and my debts on top of the desk in full sight of anybody that happens to drop into the rooms, Howard. It was an awfully silly thing for me to do. I didn't intend that document for public circulation. Whew, 'Snoopy' Morgan, the tutor in our entry, might drift in there looking for me. He reads the riot act every week or so as a matter of course. You wait here and I'll

run back and tuck the sheet of paper out of sight."

Meserve trotted briskly toward the dormitory, scampered up the stairs, bolted into his sitting room, and pounced upon the list of his sins which lay conspicuously on the desk. After trying to jerk open two drawers which stuck fast, as was their habit, he hastily thrust the sheet of paper between the leaves of a bulky volume which reposed upon the uppermost shelf of the book-case, as the handiest refuge that attracted his roving eye. Instantly thereafter he departed at full speed and rejoined Craig, who was missing street-cars with his accustomed tranquillity.

His mind relieved of its burdens, Thomas was in fine fettle for base-ball and, as matters turned out, he pitched with so much skill and energy that the Freshman captain praised his work and asked the 'varsity coach to watch the last two innings of the game. That exalted personage was visibly impressed and condescended to say to the blushing Thomas:

"You have improved a good deal since I looked over the Freshman squad the other day. I shall borrow you to-morrow and give you a try-out in faster company."

"Do—do you mean that you want me to report with the 'varsity squad?" stammered the Freshman pitcher.

"Yes, until further notice, Meserve."

Thomas expressed his thanks in stumbling fashion and confided to Howard Craig:

"You deserve credit for that honor. I tell you, a fellow can't begin to do himself justice at anything if his mind is all stewed up and distracted seven ways for Sunday. If you had forced me into a receivership two months ago, I swear I believe I might have been pitching regularly with the 'varsity by this time."

Craig grinned but forbore to throw cold water on this theory, which seemed thoroughly sound to its enthusiastic exponent. Care-free and happy, Thomas turned from bright visions of success on the baseball field to tell his room-mate what great things he intended doing in other paths of endeavor. He would study hard and "waltz into the Sophomore class with spangles on," for one thing, and his family was going to be proud of him. He might even try for a scholarship prize or two next year.

In this enviable mood, Thomas lingered not at the gymnasium, but hurried into his clothes, well ahead of Craig, to go to his rooms, clear up his desk, put his text-books in order, and make ready to spend the evening in the hardest kind of study. While he was engaged in this praiseworthy task of setting things to rights, he happened to think of a minor item or two which he had failed to include in the list of liabilities. It would never do to muddle things

with the receiver. A complete inventory was part of the contract with Craig. Thomas whirled about to lay hands on the book in which he had so hastily hidden the original document.

There was no bulky volume upon the topmost shelf of the bookcase. Somewhat excited and puzzled, he began an erratic search, tossing books this way and that, looking behind the shelves, peering under the furniture, pitching divan pillows to the floor. Then feeling uncertain of the identity of the book he wanted, for he had not paused to read its title, he began to shake one portly volume after another, snatching them up at random, but no smudgy slip of paper fluttered from between the leaves. Perhaps some fellow had run in and borrowed the missing book.

Dashing into the entry, Thomas Meserve hailed the three Freshmen who lived in his dormitory, but they pleaded not guilty and he returned to his room considerably agitated. The scheme of committing one's intimate and personal troubles to paper might have answered very well for a Robinson Crusoe who dwelt on a desert island, besides which his man Friday had been unable to read, but it was a risky performance for a college campus, and Thomas Meserve was not at all anxious to have this disgraceful summary of his record fall into strange hands.

He was still engaged in turning the room upside down in an aimless, hurricane style of search, when a round-faced elderly negro timidly ventured as far as the doorway, stood dismayed at the scene of confusion, and ventured to observe with an apologetic manner:

"Never mind, Mistah Meserve. I'll come back when you'se done thro' havin' dem fits. 'Scuse me, but I jes' wanted to 'splain 'bout doin' a errand for you this afternoon when you was done gone out to th' fiel'. My, but this yere room looks as if you was feelin' powerful rankabumptious. Reckon I'll have a mawnin's work pickin' it up."

Thomas halted in his mad career and asked with much vehemence:

"Were you in here this afternoon, Alexander Snodgrass, and what the dickens was the errand you did for me?"

Mr. Snodgrass ambled into the room, twiddled his hat in his hands, and meekly began to explain:

"It was 'bout dem books you tol' me t'other day to——"

"Books! What books? Jumping Jiminy, you didn't send them——"

"You lit on me like a ton o' brick las' week for disrememberin' to pack 'em in a box an' ship 'em to your pa by express, Mistah Meserve," Alexander Snodgrass broke in to say with a good deal of dig-

nity. "They was a birthday present, you 'splained, so I wropped up th' two of 'em mos' particular an' give 'em to the express man when he drove on th' campus at four o'clock."

The pink and white complexion of Thomas Meserve had blanched to a sickly pallor. Backing against the divan, he sat down, plump, as if his knees had been suddenly shorn of their strength. His mouth was open while he stared, now at the bookcase, now at Alexander Snodgrass, and strove in vain to find words to fit the awful situation. At length he managed to gasp in broken accents:

"W-was—was—one of the two b-books on the top shelf yonder?"

"Yes suh, right on top, an' t'other one was on the next shelf below where I done put 'em when I dusted th' room yestiddy. What all I done wrong, heh? Why is you so dumfoozled, Mistah Meserve? You cussed me out somethin' scand'lous a while ago 'cause I done forget to sen' dem books. I'se got a reputation as th' mos' reliable, 'sponsible sweep in this yere dormitory. You ain't reely findin' fault, is you?"

The voice of Thomas Meserve was weary and his gesture mechanical as if life had lost all its zest, as he feebly rejoined:

"No, Alexander, it is all my fault. I did tell you to put those two large, expensive books in a box and

ship them to Cleveland. They cost me ten dollars and they were a birthday present for my father. I intended to show him that I had solid taste in reading. I—I never dreamed that you would get so dreadfully busy this afternoon. In fact, the matter never entered my head when I—" Thomas gulped as if he were facing the hangman's noose, beat his poor, distracted head with his two fists, and pensively regarded the amazed countenance of Alexander Snodgrass.

"Ain't you done paid for dem books? Is th' store-man tryin' to get 'em back an' makin' trouble for you?" queried the tender-hearted sweep. "Bless your soul, I'se got ten dollahs you kin have as long as you want it. I reckon your daddy gwine be powerful pleased wid dem hefty, high-toned books, an' what he finds inside 'em."

"Yes, Alexander, that's it. What he finds inside 'em is the important feature. Juicy reading, all right." A faint smile flickered across the Freshman's despairing features, for although hope was dead, his sense of humor could not be wholly submerged. " 'Obey orders if you break owners' was your motto this afternoon. And this has undoubtedly busted me."

"Mebbe I better come around when you don't feel so upsot," suggested the sweep. "I'se thankful you don't bear me no hard feelin's, but I'se sure sorry

for your distresses. 'Pears to me you has a mos' mysterious an' aggravatin' 'fliction, suh. I seen my duty an' I done been gone an' done it, jes' like you tole me."

"Good-night, Alexander, you have done *me* up brown," murmured Thomas as the sweep stole forth with a solemn air as if he had been attending a death-bed. Left to himself, the Freshman bolted the door and walked the floor with hasty, fevered stride. Somewhere in one of the two volumes of "The World's Greatest Orators" was ambushed that dreadful confession of his college misdeeds, in tabloid form, as it were; his sad record for discipline and scholarship, and the black enumeration of his sinful debts; his dealings with a Hebrew usurer; his convivial obligations to cafés, and his dubious transactions with the tailor. And as fast as trains could carry it, this document must be speeding toward his implacable father.

CHAPTER II

THE BOMB EXPLODES

THE unfortunate Freshman was still striding to and fro and talking to himself when Howard Craig popped in and, at sight of his obvious mental disorder, lustily demanded:

"For gracious sakes, Tom, what is the matter now? Why, you are worse than ever. I thought I had you all straightened out and on the sunny side of the street. Come, come, calm yourself and confess it to your receiver."

"I am doomed," wailed Thomas. "No sooner am I pulled out of one hole than I fall into a deeper one. And life is so unexpected! And I try so hard to do the right thing. My college course has been hoodooed from the start. I might as well quit."

"Overlooked a few creditors? Found a warning letter from the Dean? Heard from your stern father again?" calmly asked Craig. "I thought your lucid interval might last some time. I was quite encouraged this afternoon. Guess I fooled myself."

Thomas pulled himself together and made a fairly coherent confession of what had befallen him, at which even the unemotional Craig was daunted. He pondered for several minutes, chuckled, frowned, and cried out:

"As a footless performance this breaks all your records, Tommy, and you were already in a class by yourself, you know. So you tucked that asinine Robinson Crusoe paper away in a book and then shipped it home to your dad! Receiver be hanged! What you need is a strong-armed keeper, or two of 'em, to stand watch day and night. Didn't you look at the book? Didn't you have the sense to remember that you had told Alexander to pack it and send it by express?"

"I was in an awful hurry, and I guess I was thinking of something else, Howard," faltered Thomas. "I felt so good over our scheme to fix up all my troubles that I had a kind of dry jag and, no, I can't recall looking at the book at all when I hid the sheet of paper in it. But what good does it do to scold me now? I shall get all the punishment that is coming to me."

"Oh, pooh, Tom, don't be a quitter. We must not give up without making some kind of a bluff. Have you telephoned to the express office to find out whether the package has been forwarded? Perhaps we can head it off at this end."

"Great idea, Howard!" and Meserve brightened and madly dived after his hat. "Let's dash over to the drug store and call up the express office. It looks like a fighting chance. I was so flabbergasted that I never thought of doing anything at all. I feel kind of hollow and shaky."

Alas, to the earnest questions asked over the telephone, the answer came back that the box addressed to "Thomas W. Meserve, Sr., Cleveland, Ohio," had been promptly dispatched on the five o'clock express to New York. If the clerk at the other end of the wire expected to be praised for this speedy transaction, he was disappointed. The telephone receiver bore to his ear a hollow groan and what sounded suspiciously like a malediction on his head and the corporation for which he toiled. Out of the drug store tottered Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr., and crossed the street to the stone steps of the nearest recitation-hall, where he sat himself down. The faithful Craig did likewise and suggested hopefully:

"Is it really as bad as all this, Tom? How about telegraphing to your mother and asking her to intercept the box? Maybe she can head it off before the old gentleman has a chance to see the books. A fellow's mother will generally help him out of a tight corner, don't you know."

"She is out in Denver visiting my aunt. And if

she were at home, I don't believe she would dare to intercede for me very hard. Last year when I was dropped from my class, father was for putting me at work to do stunts with horse-shoe nails right then, but she begged hard and balked him of his prey. Honestly, I didn't intend to be so foolish this year. I guess I am built that way."

Craig was not to be beaten without another effort and after some cogitation he ventured to observe:

"Is there no chance of bribing a servant by wire?"

"Not on your life. They are all afraid of the pater, and ten to one the message would not get past him. I am up against it, Howard, and here is where I bid old Elmsford farewell forever."

"Oh, pooh, Tom, we can cook up a telegram to send to your father himself. Make it read something like this, 'Sent wrong birthday present by mistake. Please return express package unopened'."

"You are not as well acquainted with him as I am," sighed the Meserve heir. "That message would make him open the box just to discover what unexpected performance I had been guilty of this time. And when he does unearth those infernal books he will begin at the preface and read every page to the end of Volume Two without skipping a line. He is a sincere and painstaking reader if ever there was one. And I don't even know which volume contains my charge of dynamite. It may be a

week before he plows his way as far as that. And I cannot stand the suspense, Howard. I shall simply go all to pieces. You had better pick out a death-watch from among the fellows in our entry."

"My goodness, but this is a dramatic situation," cried Craig, in whose voice there was a shade of gloating satisfaction which excessively annoyed his dolorous companion. (Craig had literary aspirations and was writing for the college magazines.) "Here you are, in the hands of the blind fates, Thomas, my boy, and a thousand miles or so away, your doom will be drawing nearer a page at a time. Every time your father begins to read another of the world's most famous orations he will be just that much closer to the tragic revelation. What a plot for a short story!"

"It is more like a plot for the undertaker," grumbled Thomas. "The horse-shoe nail factory is bad medicine, and I hate to think of it. But that is not the worst of it, by a long shot. I shall be soured on at home, held up as an awful warning and a horrible example, and treated like a naughty little boy. Father is not so very old in years but he seems to lack sympathy with youth. I sometimes feel as if he had never been really young. I am already slated for the paternal boycott and the outer darkness. I suppose I deserve it, but it is awfully hard luck all the same. It comes just when I was about to brace

up, turn over more new leaves than are to be found in 'The World's Greatest Orators,' and live down my sad past. If the explosion comes, I shall not go home. I will try to get a job somewhere else and be my own master."

"Oh, don't throw up your hands yet," counselled Craig. "Your father may be too busy to read just now. Perhaps the horse-shoe nail market is on the boom. You will be going home for the summer before long. It may not be too late then."

"I would go out to Cleveland to-night on the chance of beating those famous, long-distance orators in a breakneck finish," was the reply. "But if I leave college now I am sure to flunk my examinations, and then I should be in just as bad a predicament. Speaking of horse-shoe nails, this is a nightmare and I never felt less like joking. I cannot sleep a wink to-night, Howard. This is a case of being put to the torture."

"I am willing to go to Cleveland and beard the lion in his den," stoutly quoth Craig as he laid his hand upon the restless fingers of his friend. "The deuce of it is, though, that all I can deliver is a lot of your promises to be good, and he has heard them before. And really there is no explaining the document in the case. When it came to teetotally queering yourself, you did not overlook one solitary bet. However, you are not dead yet. Come on down-

town. We'll play some billiards and eat supper at Traeger's, on me. You will not want to meet any of the eating-club crowd to-night."

Given more years and a wider experience of life, this brace of Freshmen might not have viewed the situation as utterly hopeless. If youth, however, has its peculiar joys it has also its own penalties. And one of the latter is the lack of perspective, so that events wear an air of tragic finality far beyond their real and ultimate importance in the scheme of things. Having convinced himself that his college career was blighted, and his father's wrath imminent and disastrous, Thomas Meserve already looked upon himself as an outcast and a foot-ball of fortune. He would not return to Cleveland; no, his mind was made up. His father had always misunderstood him. Of course, he meant to write to his mother, but if she should secretly send him money, he must return it, kindly but firmly. After he had found a "job" and established himself upon his own two feet he would go home for a visit.

These introspections served to maintain a stern and Spartan attitude for a little time, but next day the Freshman found his nerves in shaky condition. The suspense of waiting for the blow to fall was very racking, and the victim began to feel panicky and was very easily startled. On the base-ball field he was so erratic that the 'varsity captain lost patience

and sent him back to rejoin the Freshman squad. This was a cruel disappointment, made more poignant by the unjust comment of the coach:

"You behave as if you had broken training, Meserve. I am disgusted with your performance. I heard you were flighty but after I took you over to the 'varsity field I expected you to realize your opportunity."

"I—I haven't broken training. I have a good deal on my mind to-day," sadly replied Thomas. "I am expecting very bad news from home."

"Expecting bad news? I never heard an excuse like that. I am not looking for a prophet. I want ball-players," was the unfeeling comment.

This was in the nature of a last straw, and Thomas sulked in his rooms, replying to Craig's efforts to banter him into a more stalwart mood:

"It is all so outrageously unjust. Everybody hits a man when he is down. I can't play ball, I can't study, and it is hardly worth while trying to do either. Men have gone crazy with a good deal less reason than this."

Almost a week passed, and Thomas was "flunking" in one recitation after another with an air of careless indifference. There was no more fight in him. His room-mate's loyal exhortations were unheeded and if any one had said "booh" he might have jumped through the nearest window. No word

came from Cleveland but the silence was as severe a punishment as could have been devised.

At length, and it seemed ages and ages since the fateful day on which Alexander Snodgrass had sent the "World's Greatest Orators" on their devastating journey, a messenger boy presented at the door of the Freshman's rooms a yellow envelope which Thomas ripped open with unsteady fingers. He had expected the worst, and here it was:

Shall arrive Elmsford Friday morning. Let nothing interfere with your meeting me.

T. W. MESERVE.

Thomas showed the telegram to Craig and faltered:

"The blow has fallen, Howard. Didn't I tell you that he was an earnest and sincere reader? The fatal document must have been in the second volume. Well, I am glad, honestly I am, to know that the bomb has exploded. The one person in history with whom I can profoundly sympathize is that old duffer, Damocles. It is all over with poor Thomas. Father didn't even send for me, do you note that? He is coming on here to drag me home with him after settling my bills for the honor of the family."

"It certainly looks like it, Tom. He appears to be headed this way with all sail set. You can just bet that I will say a good word for you, if I can make

him listen, and so will a hundred other Freshmen."

Tom Meserve stood in the centre of the room, chin up, chest out, fists clenched, a fine figure of defiance, as if he had resolved to die at his post. The pose was only assumed, however, and presently he said in a die-away voice which sounded not in the least heroic:

"You don't know him, Howard. After he has chatted with the Dean and with a few of my creditors he will be too mad to listen to what a million Freshmen might have to say for me. This is the last nail in my coffin—his coming on to Elmsford, I mean. Oh, Alexander Snodgrass, you meant well, but you surely did stack up trouble for me."

Tom caught up his hat, jammed it fiercely over his eyes, and declaimed quite ferociously:

"I do not propose to stay here and let him take me captive and lead me home by the ear. I am going to pack my trunk to-day. Father is due here to-morrow morning and that gives me less than twenty-four hours' start. You—you may have my share of the furniture, Howard, and the pictures, and the rugs. D-darn it, I believe I am getting weepy."

Craig threw his arm across the shoulders of his forlorn comrade and cried with emotion:

"Don't be a fool, Tom. Don't give up yet, old

man. You are clean crazy to go charging off this way. Why, your mother will never get over it. Where on earth can you find a job, anyhow?"

"I—I don't intend to go any farther than New York," quavered the fugitive Freshman. "And I can send word to mother that I am all right without giving my address. As for father, he has brought it all on himself. He—he ought to have known better. If he had given me a d-decent allowance I could have kept out of debt."

"You have had enough money, more than I have to spend," was Craig's sober comment, "but you wanted to travel with the high-rollers of the class. I am not going to hit you when you are down, Tom, but maybe this is the kind of a jolt you need. Only don't be a quitter. And don't make a bigger ass of yourself by running away. Stay here and face the music like a little man. Your pater's bark may be worse than his bite."

"Oh, shucks, I have had my chance and I have made a mess of every blessed thing," sighed the other. "Let's quit talking it over for to-night. My head feels as if the lid was about to blow off."

"All right, Tommy, old man. I am awfully sorry I can't be here to-morrow morning. The Freshman nine goes to Lawrenceville to play and we have to take an early train. But don't fly the coop until I get back to-morrow night. Promise me that."

Meserve shook his head with an undecided air, said nothing, and moved toward the campus gateway. Craig had to leave him because of an appointment with the athletic subscription committee, and the forlorn Freshman wandered aimlessly through the quadrangle, having forgotten the minor detail of supper. Presently the dusky campus began to seethe and hum and hundreds of clamorous young men flocked toward the fence. It was a spontaneous eruption that soon attracted the dormitory population from every quarter. After a fusillade of cheers, a great chorus of strong voices burst into the swinging refrain of

"Chi Ro, Omega Lambda Chi!
We meet to-night to celebrate
The Omega Lambda Chi."

As if a signal had been given, the crowd surged forward, arranged itself into ranks linked together arm in arm, and began to dance in a weaving, skipping maze, circling one elm tree after another, while over and over again a thousand young men chanted the fragmentary song of the Omega Lambda Chi. The origin of this rite was obscure. It was a campus tradition handed down from some fraternity long since vanished. But as soon as ever the spring-time was drifting into summer there happened this curious ceremonial of "Omega Lambda Chi night."

The words ran to a heady, intoxicating sort of tune which was tirelessly reiterated while the celebrants rollicked across the campus and into the street, still singing to every elm in its turn, like a Bacchic chorus come to life after two thousand years of silence.

Tom Meserve stood in the shadows and watched the dancing multitude go streaming past the dormitory halls, nor did he move away until from afar he heard the rolling, cadenced chant sound fainter and fainter:

"We meet to-night to celebrate
The Omega Lambda Chi."

As he trudged heavily toward his rooms, remorse and regret were tormenting him. He had been of these men of Elmsford, privileged to share their wholesome, buoyant life, and he had flung it all away. The black dog was upon his back and for the first time he was learning what it meant to suffer. Going into his bed-room he locked the door, unwilling to face his room-mate. Craig raised a shout of greeting when he returned, but there was no response. At last a subdued, weary voice spoke from beyond the barrier:

"Good-night, Howard. I have gone to bed."

Craig dropped into a chair, rubbed his honest head, scowled at the locked door, and said to himself:

"Poor old Tommy! I wish I were older and had more sense. I don't know what to do for him. I suppose he will be starved out in no time when he gets into the big city, if he really does bolt, and then he will have to go home and eat more humble pie than fatted calf. The problem will have to solve itself. He is the most useless ever, but I am surely fond of him."

Next morning Craig overslept and was compelled to make a cyclonic departure to meet the Freshman nine at the railroad station. He aroused Thomas, who unbarred the door, sleepily mumbled farewell and wished the team good luck, beyond which there was no time for talk. Craig fled in haste, feeling guilty that he had not delivered himself of sundry bracing exhortations. He had vital concerns of his own to think of, however, and it was unfair to expect him to forget for a moment the fact that he was journeying afar to play ball for the honor of the great and glorious Freshman class.

As the Lawrenceville game turned out, Craig made two hits, played brilliantly in left field, and, in brief, turned the tide of victory so strongly for his own nine that he was acclaimed the hero of the contest. During the homeward journey the game had to be threshed over by innings, and Craig found no time to brood over his room-mate's misfortunes until the train drew near Elmsford late in the evening. It

was with much anxiety and foreboding that he forsook the other players at the corner of the campus and hastened to his dormitory. The sitting-room was empty, there was no Tom Meserve in his bedroom, and on every hand were signs of a rapid and disorderly exodus. Craig scanned the desk of the fugitive for some farewell message and discovered the following note, scribbled with a trembling and uncertain pencil:

DEAR HOWARD:

I am giving this to Alexander Snodgrass with orders to hold it until after my father has left the rooms for the day, and then put it where you will be sure to find it. I don't want father to read it. I suppose he will hang around town to have a talk with you. You need not meet him, if you see him first. I felt as if I wanted to have it out with him, really I did, but I lost my nerve again while I was sitting here waiting. It was something awful. You don't know how rocky I feel. It is nine o'clock in the morning now and I have decided to clear out on the next train to New York, which will just miss him. I have swiped a couple of your clean shirts, and will send them back, sure. Mose Einstein happened to drop in early and I sold him some more clothes, and I can hock my watch and some other stuff on the way to the station, so I am all right for cash. If you see my father give him the best game of jolly you can, won't you? You need not lie about my college record, I don't want you to, but maybe you can pick out one or two good spots in it. I suppose I am a coward and a yellow pup, but I just can't go home. It is absolutely impossible. Fellows younger than I am are making their own living. I

will write you as soon as I can find a job and can look the world in the eye. I owe Jimmy Jenkins ten dollars. You can sell my Morris chair and pay him. I hope you can find a better room-mate in place of

Yours for keeps, TOM.

CHAPTER III

SERGEANT HOGAN INTERVENES

A VERY young man of the most gentlemanly appearance emerged from a shabby hotel in a side street leading from Union Square and looked askance at the crowd which eddied along the pavement. He was one of an innumerable company of atoms that ran to and fro over the face of the metropolis, and a week of vainly searching to find a place among them had seared the soul of Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr. His courage and his funds were ebbing fast. Worse than this, he had caught a glimpse of his father on the day before and was convinced that the paternal pertinacity which had wrested a fortune from horse-shoe nails would be slow to abandon the trail. Perhaps the secret that he intended to flee to New York had been cunningly extracted from Craig, who was a poor hand at subterfuge, thought the fugitive. At any rate, the sight of T. W. Meserve, Sr., as discerned afar off, had plunged his son into a state of acute panic, so that he was afraid to traverse the main thoroughfares

and skulked down-town and back again by the most devious and disreputable routes.

College Freshmen were in no demand. New York seemed satisfied to do without them, although Thomas refused to acknowledge this depressing fact as long as possible. He steered clear of his father's business friends and sought a foothold on his own merits, chasing "Want Ads" with the most commendable agility, pestering city editors who might stand in need of a bright cub reporter, and haunting the corridors of up-town hotels on the chance of finding a lad to tutor, or of "hearing something to his advantage." He had never seriously investigated the labor market as affected by the law of supply and demand. All successful men must have made a start somewhere and somehow, he reasoned, but if they had begun at the bottom of the ladder they must have selfishly pulled the ladder up after them.

"Footless" as he was, there was a streak of stubbornness in the luckless Thomas, and he could not picture himself as going home or retreating to Elmsford to find a temporary refuge with Craig and his other chums among the Freshmen. Hitherto New York had been a kind of enchanted land, to be visited when one had money to throw away, a glittering, alluring paradise for undergraduates to make merry in. Now it had become an unfriendly, chaotic in-

ferno, lonely beyond words, in which struggling mankind had no time for a friendly greeting or a helping hand. On the campus Tom Meserve had been a personage. Here he was a cursed nuisance. He had fled from college as little boys "run away," without any definite purpose, with the foggiest notions of what might lie before him.

Alas! there was no amiable Abe Hamburger to swap cash for promissory notes at ten per cent a month, and Thomas had sold his surplus clothing ere he took to his heels. It seemed absolutely incredible that he must soon be adrift without a cent in the world, but the bitter reality was not to be denied. His father preferred to find quarters in the old Astor House whenever business called him to New York, of this Thomas was well aware, but he balked at the idea of seeking this ignominious harbor and begging for forgiveness and a square meal in the same breath. An absurd yet pitiful figure was this sprightly, attractive lad, no more fitted for a flight into the big and bustling world than a fledgling sparrow.

Thomas had turned his very last dollar into small change, a harrowing event in itself, when he made the acquaintance of the first man to show the slightest degree of human interest in his welfare among all the myriad dwellers in Manhattan. The derelict Freshman was headed down-town, after making his

reluctant plunge into the hostile current of the streets, bent on interviewing a gentleman who had advertised in *The Herald* for a "private secretary. Must be a collegian." Preferring to avoid Broadway, he veered into Sixth Avenue and walked for some distance, debating whether or not to squander car-fare in this critical status of his finances, a sane impulse that would have delighted his "receiver," Howard Craig.

Thomas was passing a corner saloon in a neighborhood which showed signs of wear and tear, when there arose a sudden and prodigious outcry behind the swinging half-doors. A deep voice bellowed wrath and defiance, there followed a crash as of breaking furniture, and the sound of furious scuffling. Tom ventured to peer over the blind and then dodged aside in time to escape the impact of a burly giant of a man who cannoned out upon the pavement in front of three others who were propelling him with great violence, the foremost hammering his broad back with a bung-starter.

"Bounced, be gob," exclaimed the ejected one, bounding to his feet as if made of rubber. Then spying the interested Freshman, he cried vehemently: "Here, me lad. Hold my coat and hat. I was took in flank and surprised. 'Twas an ambuscade. Here goes for a charge."

With this he began to toss apparel at Tom who caught and held it while he stared wide-eyed at the

undaunted stranger, who caught his breath with a whistling sound, turned swiftly on the enemy, shot his fist into the stomach of one who had lingered, hastened the entrance of another with a well-aimed kick, and shot into the saloon faster than he had come out. Thomas followed rather gingerly, murmuring with frank admiration:

"I must see the finish of this. He is a good sport and has plenty of sand, all right."

This time the battle was brief but furious. As many as five loafers and bar-keepers rallied to the aid of the "bouncer" and against such odds as these single-handed valor was overmatched. Heroic was the resistance but once more the indefatigable gladiator went flying through the door to land upon his head with a skull-cracking thump. There was no chance to kick him while he was down, however, for he scrambled to his feet like a cat, wiped his bleeding nose with his fist, and beckoned to Thomas, who had quietly retreated after flattening himself against the wall, aghast at this furious style of hand-to-hand combat. The stranger trotted nimbly into the nearest side street, and the Freshman tagged after, silently offering to restore the coat and hat.

"You are a real good lad," exclaimed the stranger with a merry smile that was somewhat twisted because of a swelling lip. "I am ashamed to have you see me makin' a disorderly retreat, but I am not

the strong man I was before I did two enlistments in the Philippines. The fever and all took the starch out of me. Oh, I am not done with 'em yet over yonder in the saloon. Don't think I'm drunk. I never touch a drop."

Thomas had time to survey the rugged yet pleasing aspect of this singular person who proclaimed the doctrine of total abstinence in such unusual circumstances. He was much older than the Freshman although still a young man on the right side of thirty. His face was brown, his gray eyes had a dancing light of virile enjoyment of life as it came to him, and his chin belonged to the fighting breed. Glancing over his shoulder he observed that his late assailants were grouped outside the saloon and he spoke up briskly:

"If you're not too busy, me lad, do you mind footing it two blocks up and one over, west, and you will see Dennis O'Toole's billiard emporium. There should be four buck privates in there punchin' holes in a table with their poor sufferin' cues. They're all in uniform. Tell 'em Jack Hogan needs them and they will come on the jump. I want to stay here and reconnoitre."

Thomas dared not refuse. Mr. Hogan had a masterly and forceful way with him, besides which the youngster who had been so summarily impressed as an ally was filled with a natural curiosity to wit-

ness the next stage of the campaign. Therefore he ran at full speed, went wide of a policeman who was helping himself to peanuts from a vender's barrow, and had no difficulty in finding the "billiard emporium" aforesaid. The four "buck privates" of Uncle Sam's infantry were harmlessly squabbling over the score, but they grounded their cues at attention while Thomas delivered his brief message.

"Has he been fighting? And does he need help?" asked one of them in matter-of-fact tones.

"Yes, and five men jumped on him and he put up the bulliest kind of a scrap," Thomas excitedly blurted.

"Only five of them? He got licked or he wouldn't be sending for us," was the comment of another soldier. "Jack Hogan must be getting soft. All right, men, I suppose we'll have to quit our game and see what he wants."

Thomas led the way with a fluttering emotion of pride, as if he were in command of a military expedition. Behind him, keeping step, two and two, tramped the heavy shoes of the calm and ready privates. Mr. Hogan, doing sentry duty in the side street, welcomed them without emotion and explained as they clustered about him:

"I slipped away from ye, boys, to play a bit of very mild poker, me only dissipation as you well know. I was handed the tip that the game in the back-room

yonder was straight. It wasn't. I was robbed of me eighty dollars, discharge pay and travel allowance, and when I hollered they threw me out, twice. My eighty dollars is in th' pants pocket of the boss robber and he is still inside there. I have kept my eye on both doors. Will you help me get back my eighty dollars?"

"Sure, Jack. How about the police? You have chucked the uniform but we are still on the muster roll," spoke up the tallest of the four privates.

"The young lad here will do outpost duty and watch for the cops. They will not bother the place unless th' cut-throats inside are gettin' the worst of it," replied Hogan. "Come on quick. They've all slipped in behind the doors."

Thomas was left to follow with due caution while the attacking party of five advanced at the double-quick, stormed the saloon door with a yell, and entered like a landslide. Faithful to his trust, the Freshman guarded the line of retreat, although he was wild with eagerness to behold the scrimmage. From the noise it was to be concluded that the party was working its way to the back-room with systematic thoroughness. The inmates began to pour out of doors and windows, but the task of the military was not to be as easy as it appeared. The neighborhood had begun to swarm toward the scene and a mob was gathering as by magic.

Jack Hogan and his friends must fight their way out again, as it appeared to the Freshman, and he could not force a passage through to warn them of the peril in rear. In a surprisingly short time the voice of Hogan was heard in a roar of triumph and presently he fought his way to the sidewalk dragging after him a fat, red-faced man whom he dumped down like a sack of meal. The four privates came boiling out in close order and in a twinkling the mob closed in on them. Jack Hogan was tugging at the fat man in desperate haste, but his energies were sorely hampered. At last, with a mighty wrench, he fetched away one leg of his victim's trousers, waved the fragment over his head like a guidon and shouted:

"Clear out of this, boys. It is gettin' too hot for us."

Almost submerged by the angry, clamorous mob, they cleared a path, hammer and tongs, while Tom Meserve took to his heels to save himself. Just then a shrill cry arose behind him:

"There goes the look-out for the soldier gang. Get after the lad and beat him up."

Thomas looked behind him. He was being pursued by a score of ruffianly looking men and boys whose purpose was most disquieting. He knew not which way to turn for refuge, and he expected to be overtaken and kicked and clubbed to a jelly. His

Presently he fought his way to the sidewalk dragging after him a fat, red-faced man

dangerous situation had not escaped the vigilant eye of Jack Hogan, and this loyal comrade promptly bellowed to his followers:

"Cut loose for yourselves, boys. Hike for the Governor's Island boat. I must stick by the lad. He is the real stuff."

The frightened, panting Freshman stole another glance rearward and beheld Hogan vault over the tail-board of an express wagon, snatch the reins from the driver's hands, hit him a reassuring thump on the back, and larrup the horse into a clumsy gallop. Past the pursuing crowd rattled this chariot, Hogan ducking stones, bricks, and bottles hurled at him. A moment later he pulled into the curb, waved an arm at Thomas who leaped aboard in a headlong rush, and the wagon dashed onward, making a hopeless stern chase of it. A few blocks of flight at a rapid gait and Hogan found time to explain to the driver of the vehicle:

"I seemed kind of hasty, my friend, but the divils back yonder was after this lad with no cause whatever, and he needed speedy transportation. Did I take ye far out of your way?"

"Not a step of it," replied the wizened old expressman. "I'm Irish meself. Glad to do ye a small favor, nor am I askin' any foolish questions. So long as ye didn't mix me in trouble with th' cops, I have no kick comin'."

"It was awfully white of you," said Thomas, whose voice was a trifle unsteady. "I wish I had more," he continued fumbling in his pockets. "Take this as a little gift, won't you?"

In this manner vanished the last remnant of the fortune of the fugitive Freshman. Not to be outdone, Jack Hogan rummaged in his clothing and produced a five-dollar bill which he thrust into the driver's grimy paw with a friendly grin. The old man chuckled, cocked his head to one side, and warmly vouchsafed:

"I didn't hire meself to be run away with, but if you push it at me as hard as that, I can't refuse. Rint is high, and God knows the poor has no easy job livin' at all these days."

"Plenty more in my war-bags," said Hogan looking down at the leg of the trouser of the fat gambler, which was carefully gripped between his knees. "I'd better be fishin' out me eighty dollars, hey, lad?"

The discharged soldier felt in the pocket of his spoils of war, turned and twisted the prize this way and that, peered dolefully along every seam and crevice, and, at length, remarked in lugubrious tones:

"I ripped the wrong leg off him, that's what I went and did. I must have got me compass points twisted. I'll swear I saw him tuck it in his left-hand

pocket so I dove for his left leg and fetched it away with me, as ye will have observed."

"Maybe he shifted the money on you," said Thomas.

"'Twould be just like him. He stacked th' cards on me, an' he was low enough to follow it with stackin' his breeches. Oh, well, I done my best. Come on, my boy. We didn't charter this wagon by the day. So long, Mike."

The twain clamored down, the expressman waved a cordial farewell, and Hogan looked at Tom Meserve who stared back at the rueful soldier.

"It was my last cent on earth," said the Freshman.

"Same here. Th' five-dollar note was all I saved out of the wreck of the eighty dollars," returned Hogan. "We died game, though. A pretty mess I have led you into. It is quite natural for me to be flat broke but you look as if it pained you considerable. Oh dear! oh dear! you had better run home and forget the bad company you were dragged into by the hair of your head."

Thomas Meserve smiled uncertainly and made confession, unwilling to leave this bold and ready friend who was not afraid of "going broke" in New York or anywhere else.

"I live in Cleveland, Mr. Hogan, but I can't go home. I have been looking for work and couldn't find it. What are you going to do next? I—I,

well, it's been so fearfully lonesome here in New York that I am awfully glad that you asked me to hold your coat. My, but you aren't afraid of anything, are you?"

"Sergeant Hogan that was—Ninth Infantry—the old fighting Ninth, God bless her," solemnly returned the other. "I am afraid of only one thing, and that is rum. I have just now quit the service for reasons of me own. Oh, I was honorably discharged—no bobtail. And I had it framed up to hike for Chicago and strike my old boss for a job. I drove a truck for him ten years ago. Why are we standin' here in the street like a pair of dummies? I have a bit of a room forninst the avenue yonder and 'tis paid for until to-morrow. Will ye drop around and rest the sole of your foot and have a bite? I keep me own commissary stocked in case of bein' cut off from a base, which misfortune will happen to the best of us."

The grateful Freshman felt he had found a port in a storm. There was something frank and honest in the face and speech of Sergeant Jack Hogan. Already the youngster was stirred by something akin to hero-worship. As a small boy he had longed to go to West Point, and the sight of marching regulars and the thrilling call of the bugles and the drums had always made his pulse beat faster. The episode of this chance acquaintance appealed to his

impressionable mind as immensely romantic and diverting. He had begun to think there was no such thing as loyal friendship outside the campus, but how splendidly the four "buck privates" had rallied to their comrade's call for help without delaying an instant to question the odds! The Freshman offered his hand with sincere homage and said:

"Thank you. I want to talk to you some more. My name is Meserve. I was in Elmsford College until a few days ago."

Hogan slackened his pace and shrewdly regarded the tall youth as he made comment in this wise:

"A deserter, are you? An' was it a row with your dad, or a girl, or a shindy with the professors that made ye think your fine young life was all smashed to smithereens? By the look of you 'tis a good home you're turnin' your back on. I don't mean to butt in, lad, but I am hot-headed meself, and it was going off at half-cock that has made much heavy trouble for Jack Hogan. Can't we patch things up and put you back in college where you belong?"

Thomas shook his head, sullenly obstinate, and walked along in silence. The stalwart sergeant sighed as if his own thoughts and memories were poor company and forbore to press the argument. Soon they came to a lodging house up the stairs of which Hogan led the way to a tiny box of a room

which appeared singularly clean and orderly after the dingy, unpleasant halls.

"I scrubbed the floor meself and tidied up as best I could," explained the lodger. "Dirt worries me. I was rated a smart soldier in camp or barracks. I am travellin' in light marchin' order at present, but my arms and accoutrements will stand your inspection."

The Freshman gazed with the liveliest interest at a corded bundle of strange weapons standing in a corner.

"Trophies?" he asked.

"You might call 'em such," said Hogan, seating himself upon the cot and waving his guest toward the only chair. "One of them is a Boxer sword an' the hilt is decorated with the pigtail of the cock-eyed heathen that owned it. I got him with th' bayonet just beyond the mud wall of Tientsin. The Chinos made hash of us there at Tientsin—I was with the Ninth, understand. There was near two hundred good men hit in the two battalions the day we lay on our stummicks in th' mud and water and were made targets of. The old man—the colonel—got his—drilled clean through, he was."

"You marched to Peking against the Boxers?" cried Thomas admiringly.

"An' I lost some good friends and had precious little loot to show for it. That bolo I brought away

from Samar. We left a whole company there, massacred, they was, in a bunch. They died game. Oh, she is the finest fightin' regiment in the service, an' ye can track her by her graves from Santiago to the Philippines by way of China. But you are makin' a fool of me, boy. Shall I talk your head off while you're starvin' to death before my eyes? Get busy, Hogan. Sound mess call, you lobster."

From beneath the cot he hauled a coffee-pot, propped it over the gas jet, fished a loaf of bread and a can of deviled ham from a neatly laced canvas sack, and pulled the corks from two bottles of ginger ale.

"We have rations for two days, but I'll be on my way sooner than that," said Hogan with bracing assurance. "Help yourself. There's others a heap worse off. For dessert I'll roll ye a cigarette."

"But how are you going to find a job?" asked Thomas, in whose mind this baffling problem was uppermost. "I'll drive a truck if I have to, but nobody wants me. They won't even listen to me in this beastly town. I wish you felt like advising me."

Hogan airily flourished a muscular arm and explained as if he were addressing a wayward child:

"You look as if you were afraid of hard work, me son. A college rookie is th' most useless thing in the worrld. Now, I have a notion of what is stewin' in your poor young noodle. You think you are goin' to enlist in the army and win a commission.

It has just come to you while you were listenin' to my hot air. 'Tis no place at all for you, understand?"

"Why not?" The Freshman flushed, discomfited that he should be so easy to read, and resenting the soldier's verdict.

"Oh, I don't want to rub you the wrong way, boy, but if you could not stick in college you would go all to the bad in the army. 'Tis every man for himself there and the divil takes the hindmost. And besides, there would be some broken hearts at home. I refuse to stand for it. I like ye and you may have took notice that I am a determined man. If you don't drop this fool notion I will send warning to the recruitin' officers to head ye off and notify your daddy. Now will you be good? Have another poke at the ham and bread."

Abashed and afraid to argue the matter, Thomas Meserve was cornered, with never a plan or purpose in his poor, addled head. Desperately in need of a confidant, he sat slumped upon his chair, while, with a most dismal countenance, he poured out his heart to Sergeant Jack Hogan, who listened in non-committal silence. When the pitiful, foolish tale was done, the Freshman paused, knitted his brows, and added as an after-thought:

"What else was there for me to do? Tell me that. I was up against it both ways. There never, never was such a horrible, tragical predicament."

Hogan grinned, checked his rising mirth as unseemly, and was moved to say:

"No, I guess there never, never was, you silly, pig-headed, trouble-hunting young reprobate. And so this is what you call tragical! If you wasn't so near to sheddin' tears I'd laugh meself black in the face. You had your chance, a bigger, better chance than most men, and you didn't make good. Do you know what a real grown-up *man* does when he falls down on his duty and has nobody but himself to blame? He takes his punishment and he never squeals, and he knows that he got what was comin' to him. *You*, you are a baby, a whimperin' pup, an' ye talk of the other '*men*' in your college class. Oh, hell!"

So fierce was the contempt expressed in the speech and mien of the sergeant that Thomas slunk toward the door, ready to flee this humiliating scene. Hogan put out a long arm, gripped his sleeve, and roughly dragged him back and flung him down on the cot beside him.

"Where was ye aimin' to go?" he asked in softer tones. "I am talkin' to you for your own good. You did me a good turn. Now, if you want to worrk an' earn your salt and stand on your two feet, you follow me an' I'll make a man of you. But no more whining, no more bleatin' about 'tragical predicaments.' Ye may not thank me, but your father

will, some fine day when Johnny comes marchin' home."

The Freshman had not the spirit to resist, nor was he strong enough to face the dreadful prospect of being set adrift again. Stung by the insults with which he had been so ruthlessly bombarded he plucked up courage to say:

"You are pretty hard on me, Sergeant. I am not quite as sandless as all that. You cannot frighten me into going home, not yet, and if you are willing to put up with my foolish and annoying ways, I swear I am ready to hunt any kind of a job with you."

Hogan beamed good-naturedly, slapped this new-fledged comrade on the shoulder, and replied:

"I was rough with you, lad, and you have a right to call me down. Here I am preachin' to you, and scoldin' away as if I was fit to pass sentence. You found me in bad company an' you're too much of a gentleman to poke it at me by way of squarin' yourself for what I just now said to you. I am not a gamblin' man beyond a shuffle of the cards now an' then by way of diversion. I've seen too much of it in the service. I had no business in the back-room of that saloon, an' ye caught me with the goods. There'll be no more of it while you an' I join forces, understand? Your daddy'll never have a chance to accuse me of corrupting your tender morals."

Thomas admired the sergeant more than ever and exclaimed impulsively:

"I'm not afraid to trust you. Do you really want me to tag along with you? And aren't you really anxious about finding something to do? We are flat broke, you know, and I'll confess it makes me feel awfully lost and forlorn and cheerless. If it wasn't for you I'd——"

"Would you think about goin' home, you young prodigal?" Hogan spoke up quickly. "If so, then I'll lift ye to the sidewalk by the slack of your trousers an' leave you there. It is the best thing in the world for you to be thinking of."

"No, I am not whipped to a standstill yet, sergeant. If you really want to get rid of me, I'll go it alone."

"You little bantam, you. To hear you crow, a man might think you knew what you were doing," said Hogan.

He began to wash the coffee-pot and the tin-plates with deft quickness as he went on:

"We will cinch those jobs by sundown. They are waitin' for us somewheres in this big town. I want a start, that's all. Handling men is my trade, and I'll win my promotion. Ready? Forward, March!"

Hogan pounded down the rickety stairway as if he were leading an invincible storming party. His

confidence in himself and the star of his destiny was so stimulating that the Freshman no longer felt faint-hearted and useless. It seemed to be the most natural thing in the world that he should have linked his fortunes with the turbulent fates that guided the course of Sergeant John Hogan, late of the Ninth United States Infantry. Adventures awaited them. What mattered it that their pockets were empty? They were two musketeers and the world was their oyster. Such a thing it is to be twenty years old on a fine summer day with a brisk wind blowing off the sea and the blood coursing like quicksilver. Thomas strode beside his stalwart, deep-chested companion, head in air, arms swinging sturdily, going heaven alone knew where, and saying to himself:

"By George, this is living! There will be something doing, you can just bet, as long as he lets me fight it out with him. And if I ever do go back to college I may have a few stories to tell the fellows that will make them sit up."

CHAPTER IV

OUT ON THE LONG TRAIL

THE two soldiers of fortune chanced to pass an army recruiting office and when Thomas lingered to gaze at the gaudy posters, the sergeant grasped him by the collar and towed him onward, grimly chuckling as he read the thoughts mirrored in the youngster's frank countenance.

"That is the last resort for us, me boy," said Hogan. "My old comrades will be expecting me back amongst them, but we are after foolin' them this time. Ye cannot have much confidence in my ability to land on me feet and find you a berth in my select and highly moral company if you are still nursin' the army idea in your noddle."

"Oh, I was just looking at the gorgeous pictures," hastily explained Thomas. "The uniforms are so natty and resplendent, and never a wrinkle from top to toe. If my tailor had given me that kind of a fit I wouldn't feel so remorseful over the bill I owe him."

"You will not have a chance to consult a swell

tailor for some time, if you travel with me, you spoiled child of fortune," said Hogan. "When I was coming up-town this mornin' I caught sight of another style of poster from the tail of me eye, and it looked good. But I had me eighty dollars then and I was stepping high and scornful."

"Was it the navy?" hopefully asked the Freshman. "That would not be so bad at a pinch."

"It struck me as kind of am-amphibious like—a web-footed job for husky men not afraid of hard work. And that is what I am lookin' for this afternoon, and the same is my battle-cry. The place is not far from here. I intend to give you one more chance to imitate a young man thinking real, serious thoughts of home before I let you cut your cables. But it will do ye no harm to look the proposition over with me."

Tom Meserve restrained his curiosity and had little more to say until Hogan quickened his swinging gait and crossed the street toward a group of seedy, trampish looking men in front of an office doorway. Posted behind them was a placard reading:

MEN WANTED.

FLORIDA RAILWAY AND NAVIGATION CO.

Laborers, $1.75 a Day and Board.

Transportation Furnished.

Comfortable Quarters. Good Treatment.

Railroad Construction in a Tropical Climate

"That looks like a pretty tough proposition to me," was the doleful observation of Thomas Meserve. "I should last about a minute as a laborer in a tropical climate. However, as the lone private of this expedition, sergeant, I have no right to object."

"Tut, tut, I will have no insubordination," muttered the other behind his hand. "Don't squeal before you are bit. This looks like my game and I intend to play it strong. Me a laborer? I have heard of this bit of railroad work. They have mustered five thousand of the toughest tarriers alive down yonder on th' Florida keys, and what they are cryin' for is foreman and bosses to handle 'em. 'Tis my lawful trade as I told you before. The recruitin' officer can sign me on for one-seventy-five per, but for how long?"

"I hardly see where I come in," anxiously, almost tearfully persisted the fugitive Freshman, his dreams shorn of their glamour in a twinkling. "I cannot whip five plug-uglies at once. I appreciate the fact that this is a game after your own heart, but it is too strong for me."

"S-s-s-h, there ye go! Bleating again, which I strictly forbade," and the accents of the soldier were severe. "Will they not be needing clerks and storekeepers and commissary bosses and such like? And as soon as ever I am a boss, which will not be long,

I'll be wantin' a time-keeper. On the other hand, maybe a bit of honest toil would not kill you as quick as you think. 'Tis a great chance for good men that can steer clear of rum. Come along, now. One more whimper an' we part company."

Hogan thrust a squad of applicants this way and that, surveying these bleary, broken outcasts with great disfavor, and addressed the employment agent without wasting words.

"John Hogan is me name. No home address. Last job I held was first sergeant, D Company, Ninth U. S. Infantry. Here's me discharge papers and I am proud of them."

The harassed agent, weary of sifting the wretched material that drifted past his desk, looked at this fine specimen of a man as if he were a most refreshing sight and curtly replied:

"Good. You'll do. I want no better recommendations, and I wish you could have brought your whole company with you. Step into the next room and get your orders and your transportation. The special train leaves the Pennsylvania station, Jersey City, at seven to-night. Are you broke? Do you want a supper ticket? I am not afraid of your running away, Sergeant."

"Without tellin' you the story of me finances, I will say that the supper ticket will not be wasted," said Hogan. "I want two of them, if you please."

He pulled Thomas to the front and explained: "This lad goes with me, for better or worse. He is in rotten bad company, barrin' meself, but he is ready to enlist."

Poor Tom Meserve, always smartly, fastidiously attired, even in adversity, looked indeed as he had fallen among thieves. His incongruous appearance awakened the calloused interest of the employment agent, who asked gruffly:

"Ever do a day's work? Sure you know what you are doing? We want no more dead-wood on our hands than can be helped. Oh, pshaw, you are clean and sober, and I am shy forty men for my shipment to-night. What is your name? You don't have to give your real one, you know."

Thomas blushed to the ears, looked helplessly at Hogan, and blurted:

"T. Winthrop, if you please."

A little later this brace of duly enrolled laborers were permitted to be at large for a last glimpse of the city and its civilization which had cast them out. Thomas was in a dazed mood. He could recall dreams whose events had seemed more real and coherent than the things which had happened to him during this incredibly crowded day. He was beginning vaguely to realize that he had made many kinds of a fool of himself yet he was sternly resolved not to show the white feather. There must be no more

"bleating," and if "college sand" meant anything at all, now was the time for him to play the man.

More than ever there was something mysteriously uplifting and bracing in the companionship of Sergeant Hogan, a supreme confidence in his manner of facing the world that seemed to guarantee success in whatever he might undertake; a headlong contempt of obstacles that caught hold of the lad's imagination and blinded him to the folly of his flight to the Florida keys.

They hurried to the hotel where Thomas planned to leave his trunk in storage as a pledge for the trifling sum owed for his room, and while he was packing a suit-case for the march, the sergeant cocked his wise head to read the initials painted thereon.

"T. W. M., Jr.," he said to himself. "Then his old man has the same name as himself and he lives in Cleveland, does he? I will remember that. I may devise a small bit of strategy of me own before we hit the trail to-night."

For several minutes Hogan silently, pensively regarded the busy youth and then said to him, with the ghost of a sigh:

"I wonder why I have bothered with you at all? 'Tis no small responsibility. I came near turnin' you over to the police to be held till called for. An' I might have telegraphed your college and your folks at home, I suppose. Perhaps it is because I

made such a blazin' fool of meself at your age, though I never had your chances. You had an education handed to you on a gold platter an' you kicked the platter over. No, I never had a chance like that, an' me head is too thick to do anything with the books now. But I have learned some lessons of me own. They came high, and they came hard, so they did, an' it is my intention to hammer 'em into you, me son. If I let you go adrift, you are likely to be a lastin' sorrow to the mother that bore you."

Thomas looked up from his task, angry and amazed, and cried gustily:

"Here, I won't stand for such talk. If I am as bad as all that, you can go your way and I'll go mine. Nobody ever said such things to me, not even my best friends."

"That's what is the matter with you," calmly replied Hogan. "If they had, your eyes might have been opened sooner, and the process would not have been so painful. I'll not eat me words. It is for the sake of your mother, and mine, that I have taken you in hand. And it will do ye no harm to think over the meanin' of that remark."

"I am grateful to you," said Thomas with less vehemence, "but all this preaching is uncalled for. I have not been bad, only just foolish and thoughtless, and I was bracing up, I tell you."

"A man must make a reason for livin' in this world," observed the martial philosopher. "Did you ever think of that? By my doctrine, 'a thoughtless and foolish man,' as you politely call yourself, is so much rubbish. He ought to be swept into the trash pile to make room for his betters. There now, I'm no shining light to steer by, Thomas. I have freed me mind, an' there will be no more sermons. From now on, it will be more action than words. I have a bit of an errand down-stairs an' I will rejoin you presently."

The Freshman was sulky and humiliated and had no comment to make as Hogan went to the hotel office, sought a desk and stationery, and made use of a spluttering pen with this result:

To Mr. Thomas W. Meserve, Senior,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Dear Sir: Unbeknownst to your son, I have the honor to inform you that the undersigned has this day taken command of him. I tried my hardest to make him go home and show a grain of sense, but he is not as old as he will be some day, which you know yourself, and maybe it will benefit him a whole lot to get up against it good and hard. At least, this is how it looks to me. I am going to put him to work. It will not be as easy as college but his diploma will be worth having. I like the boy, but he has been mishandled something fierce. It would not be square to give him away and tell you what his game is. But you can bet your last blue chip that his bunkie will see that no harm comes to him. Pass the word to his

mother, if you please, that Thomas is going strong, and sends her his best love, and aims to land on his feet before he wig-wags any messages to the old folks at home. We are ready to vamoose from little old New York to-night to hit the long trail for a place where good men are in great demand, and not in the army either. Our jobs are already cinched. With kind regards and hoping you will forgive the liberty I take in kidnapping Thomas, I am

Most respectfully your humble servant:

JOHN HOGAN,
Late First Sergeant, D Company,
9th U. S. Infantry.

"When I ran away from home, I'd have been grateful to the lad that would have taken the trouble to do the same favor for me," reflected the writer as he ransacked his pockets for pennies and was delighted to find the price of a postage stamp. "Boys are sure heartless that way. He has clean forgotten even to write to his mother. 'Tis a wonder parents have courage to raise 'em at all. All Thomas can think of is his own troubles, and they aren't heavy enough to make a dent in a feather bed if you dropped them off a roof. I'll kill him or cure him, so help me."

CHAPTER V

THE SINGULAR DISAPPEARANCE OF THOMAS

Tom Meserve was vainly trying to sleep in a railroad car crowded with passengers who jested and quarrelled and sang in many tongues; for the labor drag-net had swept up Italians, Polacks, Greeks, and men from all the world, who must work or starve. Even the undaunted Hogan looked them over with disgusted amazement as one of the sorriest lots of vagrants and scarecrows he had ever seen herded together. As the sergeant glanced at the lad swaying drowsily beside him, he murmured under his breath:

"The Florida Railway and Navigation Company must be quite unpopular, or the country is going to the dogs. I never thought there was so much derelict humanity adrift in one town. There isn't a day's work in a dozen of them. The better chance for a good man, Hogan! Buck up, me boy! Elmsford College was never like this, hey, Tommy?

'Tis a fine timperance lesson, though. Th' car is full of horrible examples. Look what it has done to 'em, for the love o' Heaven. I'll bet I can find more'n one college man aboard this train, most likely cursing the day he was born."

The vile air, the stench of stale tobacco smoke, and the reek of alcohol were suffocating. Thomas shuddered and withdrew his head from the open window long enough to reply with as brave a smile as he could muster:

"It's all right, Jack. If you can stand it, I can. They are pretty rough, aren't they? I have seen hoboes, but I never expected to have to live with them. Two days and nights of this game will make me sore on the doctrine of the brotherhood of man."

Hogan beamed hopefully as if his own faith were unshaken, and foraged in his canvas sack, which yielded several sandwiches wrapped in a piece of newspaper.

"The last of me bread and divilled ham," he explained. " 'Twould have been a sin to waste 'em. 'Tis a true sayin' that an army marches on its stummick. Eat hearty."

Thomas munched his ration, then let his head rest upon the window-sill and wearily closed his eyes. The sergeant tried to read the torn newspaper and presently turned the sheet. With an exclamation he grasped the startling import of a string

of huge black head lines which ran across the front page of the flagrantly yellow journal:

FEARFUL SUFFERINGS OF
WHITE SLAVES TOILING
ON THE FLORIDA KEYS.

STORIES OF REFUGEES WHO HAVE
ESCAPED FROM THEIR
BRUTAL CAPTORS.

Thousands of Laborers Compelled
To Endure Incredible Hardships
In Terror of Lash and Pistol.

Hogan read no further than this. A shadow fell athwart the page and he glanced up just as the agent in charge of the party snatched the newspaper from his hands and tore it to bits with angry haste. The soldier leaped to his feet in fierce resentment, but checked himself lest he awaken his companion, who had suddenly drifted into slumber. With a warning gesture he beckoned the agent to follow him to the end of the car, where he grimly told him:

"You are playing in luck that I didn't wipe this dirty floor up with ye, me man. You got very gay with me and you are not dealing with the scrapin's of hades that comprises the rest of your cargo, understand? Now, how about it? I intend to keep it dark from the lad that's with me. On the level,

has this newspaper got it straight? You can't scare me out, but it isn't too late to save the youngster."

The agent had been picked for brawn and courage and he looked the sergeant between the eyes as he returned:

"No, Hogan, the newspapers have faked a lot of that stuff. Between you and me, building a railroad across the Florida keys is no giddy, gilt-edged picnic, 'specially in the summer time. Good men who can get better jobs at construction work out West won't go there. We get the leavings and we expect to get our money out of 'em." He shook his clenched fist in a burst of wrath as he added: "Are we going to lug 'em fifteen hundred miles and let 'em quit before they have worked out their transportation?"

"I notice that ye have locked the doors of the cars," dryly remarked Hogan. "And this drove of cattle didn't read the newspapers or they wouldn't be here. I forgive ye for what you did to me. I'm glad my bunkie didn't see the paper. You're a man all right. So am I. White slaves, eh? The joke is on them. I'm going down there to be one of those cruel, brutal captors."

Hogan swaggered back to his seat, perturbed and very uneasy, for all his cocksure bravado. He was not in the least afraid for himself but his responsibility for the fate of the slumbering Freshman was pulling at his heart. This role of protector, guide,

and champion had begun to awaken impulses and instincts of affection which it would not have been far-fetched to call paternal. He stood in the aisle, frowning down at the lad who had never known hardship or physical danger, who had been sheltered all his days from the world's rough hand.

"God knows what I'm leading him into," thought Hogan, "but he is as helpless as a stray kitten and I never yet turned me back on what I had once set out to do. You are booked to go the route to the finish, Mister Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Junior. And whatever it is, it can do ye no more harm than loafin' and foolin' your way through college, a sorrow to your parents and a nuisance to your friends. 'Footless' he called himself. 'Tis a new word and a polite one for a fool."

Oblivious of this affectionate condemnation, Thomas slept fitfully while the sergeant slipped his arm under the youngster's head and let it rest there until the muscles were stiff and cramped. The long, wretched night wore on toward daylight and the sodden company in the car became quieter. Haggard, unshaven, many of them ragged, they sprawled grotesquely across the seats, a picture for none other than Hogarth. When the train halted at Richmond, negroes came on board to distribute pails of coffee and sandwiches as breakfast, but the men were not allowed to disembark and the vigilant agent in

charge drove away the newsboys who were crying "Latest Philadelphia, New York, and Washington papers."

"By Jingo, this is too much like being kidnapped," yawned the Freshman. "I want to get out and stretch my legs, Jack. Don't you think we ought to object?"

"Wait till you can put it in writing," was the tactful reply. "'Twill do no good to kick to the noncoms. If some of these thirsty tarriers smelled a grog-shop in the town they couldn't be dragged back to the train. On one of these personally conducted tours to the swell resorts of Florida you have to do as you're told."

Feeling somewhat refreshed, Thomas began to study his neighbors with lively curiosity. A handsome, though dissipated-looking young Englishman across the aisle made friendly advances, as if recognizing one of his own species, and a round-shouldered little man, timid, wrinkled, and gray, halted to pass the time of day. Quite obviously they had fallen from better fortune than this. The Englishman had been singing at intervals all through the night until his bottle was empty. He had a tenor voice of beautiful quality and considerable cultivation and his choice of melodies ran for the most part to old country ballads which moved some of his audience to tears that were not altogether maudlin.

Something in the way he carried himself made Hogan murmur to the Freshman:

"He has seen service, and with smart troops at that. A cashiered officer, or I miss my guess."

The gray, timid little man babbled of his troubles and found friendly ears. He was a book-keeper, cast off after thirty years of office drudgery, driven to this last extremity to keep body and soul together. Hogan resolved to help him somehow. He appealed to the soldier's sympathies as even more forlorn and helpless than the Freshman. For the rest of this motley company he cared not a straw. If he were given authority over them he would drive them until they dropped in their tracks. He meant to climb over them and kick them out of his way.

Weary and dishevelled and begrimed, these sorry laborers came at length to the sandy pine and palmetto lands of Florida and were hauled southward in the blistering summer heat, farther and farther, until the journey seemed to have no end. Past the blue lagoons of the Indian River, in sight of the deserted winter hotels of Palm Beach, beside miles of ripening pineapple patches and stately clusters of cocoanut palms, the dusty train crawled toward the remote wilderness of the scattering keys that trailed toward the Gulf and the tip of the Florida peninsula. The railroad left the last town behind it and ran through miles and miles of desolate swamp, wire-grass and

water and tiny islands stretching to the horizon in sad, unchanging monotone.

Mosquitoes, clouds of them, poured into the open windows and drove the men mad with irritation, until a fresh salt wind came surging from the nearby sea and brought relief. It was late afternoon when the rough-laid track began to cross one long trestle after another that bridged stretches of open water of marvellous, shimmering hues of green and blue and violet. The pilgrims who crowded the car platforms shouted with profane surprise. On one side the ocean itself ran clear and unbroken to the skyline, on the other the bright water was dotted with low, ragged islets green with lush mangrove bushes.

The railroad was pushing its way southward from one of these keys to the next, built over the Atlantic itself, so bold and staggering a project even in this first glimpse that the uppermost emotion of the laborers was sheer wonderment. Then followed a common feeling of dismay which one of them expressed for his fellows in the single remark:

"It's a long walk to the Bowery, boys."

At sunset the train finally halted. Pell-mell, its passengers tumbled out and exclaimed more fervently than ever as they gazed about them. The track went no further. In front of them, to the southward, a half-built trestle stretched its spidery length out into the open sea, and in the waning light

no land could be seen beyond. Tom Meserve laughed aloud and cried:

"Oh, it looks so sweet and clean and big, Jack. This is worth coming to see, isn't it? You knew what you were doing. I am glad I came."

"It is sure a duck-footed railroad proposition, Tommy. But what next, I wonder. Do we swim for it? Ho, there she comes. Who could have guessed this would turn out to be a yachting excursion?"

A stern-wheeled steamer, relic of busier days on the Mississippi, was coughing and churning its way to a temporary wharf to seaward of the track, and at the shouted order the party trooped to meet her. The towering cabins and ornate trimmings were dingy and shabby, all the brave tinsel, gilt, and glitter neglected and battered. She seemed a fit craft to carry this forlorn ship-load of human relics who were herded on board without ceremony. Presently the hawsers were cast off and in the fleeting tropical twilight the steamer moved slowly away from the key, the unfinished trestle indicating her mysterious course like a huge finger.

"There's five thousand men quartered somewhere out yonder," said Hogan, "though I see nothin' but water and more of it. If we are to be dumped on one of these stray bits of rock they call keys I wish they'd jack it about ten feet higher above sea-level.

It's the skimpiest lookin' real estate for a man that can't swim that ever I looked at. Not that I borrow trouble at any stage of the game, but I came down here to build a railroad, not to wear meself out speculatin' whether the next high tide is goin' to lug me off to sea feet first."

"Wait till a hurricane comes hoppin' up from the West Indies," gloomily put in a roustabout at his elbow. "I don't like the looks of it. I'm goin' back to New York. This is all to the bad."

Hogan grinned at recollection of the "white slave" head-lines in the yellow journal and replied:

"Nobody is stopping you. Why don't you start, me bucko?"

The uneasy sentiment of the roustabout was echoed along the crowded upper deck of the *Memphis Queen*. Vanishing to rearward of them was the railroad and the mainland, and somewhere in this uncanny, remote world of ocean and desolate islets almost submerged, they were to be dumped and marooned. Building a railroad here was some kind of a grim, colossal joke. Past one lonely key after another the steamer lumbered noisily. The trestle had been left far behind. Darkness fell and many lights twinkled like fire-flies from the dim bits of shore.

"Those are camps," said Hogan. "Now you know your fate, Tommy. You will be combin'

centipedes from your hair to-morrow morning. And you can't run away this time if you take a notion."

The Freshman was not in a whining mood. The bigness of the work caught hold of his imagination. This flinging a railroad to Key West, a dot on the map nearer Cuba than his own country, was worth playing even the humblest part in. Man had matched his wit and courage against the might of the Atlantic in a splendidly audacious encounter. With unwonted earnestness he cried:

"I don't want to run away, Jack. I'll bet I can make a place for myself somewhere, even if I was no good where I came from. I suppose we'll have to start in with pick and shovel, but I don't care."

"Good boy, Tommy. Take it as it comes and don't mind the blisters and you and I will get our fightin' chance. There is our happy home yonder. The packet is heading for shore."

The *Memphis Queen* slid over a shallow lagoon, and her flat bottom grated across the coral reefs as she fetched up beside a flimsy wooden pier. Foremen from the camp on shore hurried on board and roughly ordered the passengers to disembark and form in line on the beach. Hogan and Tom hung back and were joined by the tuneful Englishman and the agitated old book-keeper. The quartet filed to the beach and followed the long column toward

the supply tents, where blankets were served out and the men assigned in groups to the canvas sleeping quarters arranged along rude streets in which driftwood fires were smouldering.

The scene was singularly picturesque. To Hogan it recalled the camp life of his army days and Thomas felt as if he had stumbled across a nest of buccaneers of the Spanish Main. The sergeant headed toward the beach and chose a small tent pitched where the sea breeze gushed cool from the nearby lagoon. It was already tenanted but the experienced man of action unceremoniously bundled the occupants out neck-and-crop and was indifferent to their outcry.

"I say, you have a way with you," drawled the Englishman. "My name is Fitzherbert. Do you mind if I join your mess? Really I can't stand the rest of these swine."

"Pick the softest palmetto roots and welcome to ye," cordially replied Hogan. "I sized you up in the train as the right kind."

A small voice arose in the darkness and the bookkeeper said tremulously:

"I don't want to intrude, but is there room for me? I have not had time to get my bearings and shall be very grateful——"

"Not another word, Mr. Jones. 'Tis a compliment to us," returned the host. "The Hotel de

Hogan will not turn away any guest that is decent and sober, and there will be no great rush at that."

The camp was noisy and astir only a little while longer. Worn out by the hardships of the long journey, the newcomers craved sleep and dropped in their tracks as soon as they had found tent room. The toilers who had sweated all day with the grading gangs were in no mood for late hours and the populous key became almost silent. Hogan, who was wakeful, heard the Freshman snoring at his side and wondered what the morrow had in store for the youth so strangely pitchforked into this rough-and-tumble field of action. Then the sergeant's thoughts turned to the darkened camp and he said to himself:

"What keeps me awake, I wonder? I know! 'Tis missing the sentries. I am expecting to hear a flat-footed private go poundin' past me tent. But they need no sentries here. These hoboes couldn't desert if they wanted to, being entirely surrounded by water and a most amazing lot of it."

Hogan poked his head out and blinked at the stars. The mosquitoes were troublesome, for the breeze was dying, and he had a sudden yearning for a whiff or two at his black pipe. His hospitality had somewhat crowded the tent and in order to stretch his legs and rid himself of the kinks of travel he decided to amble down to the beach and commune with

his reflections at his ease. Over the white sand the tide was lapping in whispering ripples. Toward the open sea a bright light winked at regular intervals, and the soldier thought of the many lighthouses he had watched gleam their welcomes and farewells to the army transports which had carried him around the world. Once he sighed heavily, as if in his wanderings the light of love had dropped below his horizon to shine for him no more.

Many, many nights of bivouac and trail in hostile jungles of the Philippines had made him vigilant and quick of ear, intuitively suspicious of whatever moved in the darkness. He had been musing and walking to and fro longer than he was aware when from somewhere along the shrouded key his alert hearing noted the soft splash of oars. Some belated party might be returning from a camp on another key, and it was more idle curiosity than any other motive that made Hogan saunter quietly in that direction.

The dense, twisted mangrove bushes grew nearer the water's edge as he progressed, and screened the shore beyond. Moving quietly as was his habit, Hogan wormed along the outer line of this tropical undergrowth, becoming more curious and interested, for he began to comprehend that it was the intention of the men in the boat to make a landing in no frank and open fashion. The stealthy drip and splash of

the oars was drawing nearer, and he could hear a murmur of hushed voices in strenuous argument.

Hogan stepped back into the mangrove thicket and was completely ambushed. Presently the craft was almost abreast of his hiding-place and he was able to discern that she was a small sloop with a canvas trunk cabin. Four or five men were plying oars and poles with wary deliberation, frequently delaying to listen and reconnoitre. During one of these pauses Hogan heard the man at the tiller mutter angrily:

"We ain't gwine no closer to the camp than this, I tell you. This is jest where they tole us to wait for 'em. I reckon it's most ten o'clock, ain't it? That's the time they said they'd sneak down to the beach to get the stuff."

"Half an hour mo' to wait by my guess," said another. "We kin go closer 'n this, cap'n. We ain't never run a cargo to this camp and there won't be no guards lookin' for a booze-boat, nohow. The engineer in charge of this here camp is sick with fever, they tell me. He won't be snoopin' around."

"Shet up. I'm boss this trip," snarled the man at the tiller. "I've been runnin' booze-boats outen Key West since the railroad come to these keys an' they ain't never ketched me yet. Let your anchor down easy, Jerry."

"How much you got aboard?" queried a dark figure with an oar.

"Ten cases of quart bottles and twenty dozen pint flasks," answered the "cap'n." "And talk about your whiskey, gem'men. There's a jolt in every swaller, an' a jag in every gill. They git their money's wuth, you bet."

While Hogan listened, his wrath waxed hotter and hotter. Aside from his own private and particular grudge against rum for what it had done to him in other days, he knew better than most men what the success of this infernal "booze-boat" would mean to the construction camp on the key. Evidently smuggling rotten whiskey to the thousands of laborers was an organized traffic. The stuff had power to turn the sleeping camp into a hell of fighting, uproar, and perhaps murder. And the fact that the railroad company permitted no saloons on the keys accounted for the harrowing tales of hardships and cruelty which the refugees had given to the yellow newspapers in New York. The humor of this phase of it stirred Hogan to say to himself:

"There couldn't be any worse torture for most of these 'white slaves' than to find 'emselves spraddled out on one of these keys with never a drink at all for love or money. No wonder they holler for vengeance when they hit the Bowery again."

Hogan's duty was clear in his mind. To try to board and capture the "booze-boat" single-handed was more than he dared undertake. Most likely the smugglers were armed and ready to fight their way clear. They must not be allowed to land their cargo, however, and this was a rare chance to teach them a lesson that would nip the ardor of the other ruffians engaged in the traffic. Hogan knew not where to muster help in the camp. If the laborers got wind of his proposed raid they would muster to the defence of the imperilled "booze-boat." He swore by all the gods of war and other deities of his vivid vocabulary that there should be a wholesale smashing of heads and whiskey bottles, and groped a tortuous, cat-footed course through the mangrove in the direction of the silent camp.

When he drew near to his own tent he moved with even more care, because he did not wish to arouse the Freshman, and wriggling inside, he felt in his canvas sack for a Colt's army revolver. Tom Meserve stirred and asked sleepily:

"What is it, Jack? I woke up and missed you a while ago, and it was dreadfully lonesome without you."

"Just enjoying the starlight," whispered the sergeant. "Roll over and pound your ear again."

"Are you going out again?" demanded Tom, whose eyes were wide open by now. "What's do-

ing? This is such a spooky sort of a place that I hate to see you go wandering off."

Hogan was perplexed. He wished no narm to befall his bunkie, yet the youth would never forgive him if he were left out of this adventure. Quickly deciding to confide in him, the sergeant told him to slip on his shoes and come into the open without waking Fitzherbert and Jones. As they walked along the lane between the tents Hogan tersely told what he had seen and heard, and gave his orders as follows:

"Now, I wouldn't have anything happen to you for worlds, and you must promise to keep clear of the ruction. I am thinking of your folks at home, understand? I am going to look for the engineer's head-quarters where the bosses live, bein' used to finding things in dark nights and strange places. You sneak down to the beach and along in the bushes to your left till you come to a bit of a cove. There you stay and watch out if that boat shifts her moorings. There is no danger. The pirates don't dare come ashore. If you hear men comin' down from the camp, laborers I mean, don't let 'em see you. Never mind my surprise party. I don't want you in it."

"Oh, please, Jack, I am not sandless. I belong with you. Don't treat me like a baby," pleaded Tom, his knees oddly weak but his voice fairly steady. Hogan grasped the Freshman by the shoulders, spun

him about like a top, and shoved him roughly toward the beach while he growled in his ear:

"Obey orders. Get to it. It's high time you learned the rudiments of discipline."

Thomas moved rapidly nor looked behind him, afraid of being pursued and spanked. The sergeant strode inland, surmising that the head-quarters of the camp must be at some distance from the tents of the rank and file. Before long he stumbled over a sleepy watchman who was seeking respite from mosquitoes to leeward of a green wood fire or "smudge," and, heaving this culprit to the feet by his collar, Hogan queried indignantly:

"On your rounds, are you? The guard-house for yours. Take me to the big boss of this outfit or his staff, *pronto*."

"Who—what—the—yes, indeed. What's wrong?" gasped the watchman as his startled vision took in the shadowy bulk of his captor. "Let go of me."

"When you deliver the goods," replied Hogan. "I mistrust that you were induced to stay away from the beach *till after ten o'clock*, and you will be giving no alarms to your friends afloat, understand?"

The unhappy prisoner shuddered and ceased to squirm, nor could he find courage to frame a defence against this shrewd indictment. Soon they came to a group of bungalows set in a stately cluster of cocoanut palms and the watchman feebly sputtered:

"The division engineer is sick abed. Shall I wake him up?"

"No, he must have some non-coms. Hustle, now," sternly answered Hogan.

Two foremen and an assistant engineer were aroused by the fist of the sergeant beating a violent tattoo on their flimsy doors, and at the noise the division engineer came out in pajamas, weak of body and tremulous of speech but ready to command the situation. Hogan saluted and explained:

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, and may you feel better soon, but I have marked down a booze-boat from Key West ready to land an ungodly cargo of whiskey, and I want help to capture it. Will ye do me the favor of lendin' me half a dozen good men?"

"All you want, and thanks," cried the plucky engineer. "The nerve of the scoundrels! Right under my nose! And I have been bragging that my key was clear of them."

He stepped inside the door to light a candle and thrust it close to Hogan's face.

"Who the deuce are you?" was the amazed interrogation. "I thought you were one of the watchmen."

"I arrived with to-night's excursion party—one seventy-five per day, sir," grinned the soldier. "John Hogan, if you please, late sergeant Ninth U. S. Infantry. I came across the whiskey runners

by accident. I know what the stuff will do to a camp of hard men. 'Tis me mortal foe. What's the orders, sir?"

There was sincere gratification in the voice of the engineer as he replied:

"Sergeant Hogan, you are to take command. Sorry, but I am too seedy to risk it myself. Here, McGuire and Davenport, find some men you can trust. Hurley, trot over and fetch two or three sticks of dynamite from the cut. The shot-guns are locked in the tool-house. Blow 'em out of water if you can. Hogan here has earned the right to lead you, and you will agree with me there. Good luck. I shall be waiting for news."

"A man after me own heart," said Hogan to Foreman McGuire as they began to muster their little force. "He didn't waste a word. And he gives us dynamite for ammunition. Why, this beats war! 'Booze-boats' are unpopular with him, eh?"

"The sight of one big drunk in this camp 'ud convince you that he is right," vouchsafed McGuire. "The law is no good to us here. I advise you to take him at his word and toss the dynamite sticks aboard if we can sneak close enough."

Soberly elated was the heart of Jack Hogan. What a splendid stroke of luck! The engineer had known a good man at sight, even by candle-light! And here was a piece of work precisely to his taste.

God was indeed good to the Irish, and this was promotion already. As for the foremen, they bore him no ill will for being put in charge of the expedition, viewing it as a soldier's duty. At his suggestion they made a detour of the camp and scrambled across the ledges of limestone and coral in order to attract no attention. The hour lacked but a few minutes of ten and the possibility of a clash with the laborers who had agreed to meet the "booze-boat" was imminent.

Hogan had begun to worry for the safety of the Freshman. The soldier had been on fire with the joyous excitement of his own enterprise but now that he was of a cooler and steadier mind he feared lest he might have sent Thomas on a fool's errand. How was the boy to distinguish friend from foe? To post off in the darkness on outpost duty was the most matter-of-fact business for a man like Hogan, and perhaps he had hastily taken too much for granted in the case of the raw and untried youth who had never faced a situation in the least resembling this.

The attacking party crept along the edge of the strip of beach, picked a way among the mangrove roots, and came to the tiny cove where Thomas had been ordered to wait as a lone sentinel. Hogan halted and looked in vain for his young comrade. Then he whistled very softly and listened, painfully

expectant, with a sharp sense of dread and apprehension. Creeping forward on hands and knees he peered beyond the bight of the shore-line toward the place where he had last seen the boat and where he had hidden himself. The dim outline of the sloop's hull had vanished and her slender mast no longer cut a black line athwart the starry sky.

Hogan rubbed his eyes and reproached himself under his breath. Unable to realize that the craft had stolen away, he told the others to stay where they were while he moved ahead of them. Presently he stumbled over the stranded log upon which he had sat and listened to the talk of the crew of the boat. She was no longer there nor could he anywhere discern a shadow moving across the placid lagoon, nor hear the faintest sound of oars or creaking blocks. The outlaws had taken alarm and flown or else the militant temperance expedition of Sergeant Hogan had come too late to the rendezvous. The latter conjecture was almost instantly discarded; for there was a noise of moving men to rearward of him and then he heard a tumult of surprised shouts and maledictions.

The sergeant ploughed his way back to the scene and found that his men had intercepted the course of the laborers from the camp and were engaged in making them prisoners without sparing fists and gun butts. It was a lively scrimmage, soon finished, and

as the disappointed, thirsty laborers were kicked and hustled toward their tents, Foreman McGuire declaimed to Hogan:

"It will be some satisfaction to line up these thirsty dogs and learn who they are. They will be sick of this night's work before we are done with 'em. Our engineer is making a record for grading and filling on this key, and a few rum-soaks would put the camp on the bum, would they, and make us a black disgrace before all the other gangs between Bahia Honda and the mainland!"

"Another horrible outrage for the New York papers," said Hogan. "I will go with you as far as head-quarters and report to the boss, and then I must hot-foot it back to me tent to make sure my young bunkie has found his way home. He lays heavy on my mind, for I can't understand why he was not at the cove to tip us off that the boat had slipped away."

The sergeant ran toward the beach at full speed, a prey to grievous misgivings, berating himself for having permitted Thomas to take part in the adventure. Alas, he found no Freshman in the tent, and rudely arousing the others he fiercely demanded of Fitzherbert:

"Have ye seen the lad? Didn't he come back to bed at all?"

"My word, what is the row?" snorted the sleepy

Briton in great bewilderment. "I was dreaming of a jolly good dinner at the Savoy and you chivvied me out of at least three courses, by Jove. Is the boy mislaid, do you say? No, old chap, I can't account for him."

"Then turn out and help me find him," commanded Hogan. "No, thank you, Mr. Jones. Better stay here. I don't want to lose you, too."

The book-keeper was nervously fumbling with his buttons but before he could get himself together, Hogan and Fitzherbert were running up the street of tents to assemble a searching party. McGuire was discerned through a lighted window of the division engineer's bungalow and the sergeant knocked and entered with brief apology:

"It goes against me to trouble a sick man, sir," he breathlessly exclaimed, "but I don't know where else to turn for help. I fetched a fine lad down here with me to make a man of him and he is missing, sir. He was doing sentry forninst the booze-boat and I mistrust they got away with him somehow."

"Take some lanterns, McGuire," said the engineer. "Wake up the crews of both launches. The searchlights may be of use. But it's almost hopeless to try to overhaul the booze-boat among the keys at night. If you don't find the young man, tell the skipper of the *Bonita* launch to run to Key West, and you go with him. Report the case to the author-

ities there and try to head the rascals off before they make port."

Alas, the seekers beat up and down the shore in vain and the launches cruised until long after midnight, playing their search-lights over the dark water and the white beaches and the fringing thickets of mangrove. Thomas Winthrop, as he was entered upon the pay-roll of the camp, had vanished without trace of any kind. The sergeant had no thought of sleep, and daylight found him still ransacking the cove and the undergrowth, haggard, despairing, his heart filled with sorrow and remorse.

CHAPTER VI

A PERILOUS HAVEN

THE Freshman had set out for his post of duty in a heady and high-stepping mood. Jack Hogan was the man to follow through thick and thin, thought he, and here were hazard and adventure right on the first page of the opening chapter of their comradeship. With beating heart he prowled along the beach, moving more slowly as he lost sight of the camp, taking alarm at the splashing ripple of the incoming tide. At length he came to the cove and halted, his nerves twitching while he strove to see into the gloom beyond. He could discern nothing that resembled a boat but he fancied that the light breeze brought to his ears the low murmur of voices. Unless he could hide himself nearer, the boat might slip away without his knowledge.

Tom was a novice at this kind of scouting duty and it appeared easy to pick a path through the mangrove and safeguard his mission against the chance of fiasco. The interlaced roots were like a series of traps and pitfalls, however, and their long tentacles

were slippery with the slime and wash of the tide. To his immense disgust the Freshman found himself almost helpless, groping, tripping, cutting his hands and tearing his clothes on the clusters of raccoon-oyster shells that clung to the mangrove roots. The leafage overhead made the labyrinth densely dark, and it was impossible to move without clumsy struggling that was far from silent. Thomas tried to swerve toward the beach, anything to get clear of this half-submerged jungle, and suddenly found himself sprawled out upon a mesh of pendulous branches which creaked and swayed. Rubbing the mud from his eyes he could see the anchored "booze-boat" some distance beyond. There were signs of alarm on board. Men were moving hurriedly to and fro, and the Freshman heard confused sounds of orders and warnings. One voice louder than the rest stormily exclaimed:

"I tell you somebody was thrashin' through the mangrove yonder. And it ain't none of our friends, for we ain't heard no whistle like we fixed up as a signal. Mebbe there's guards out after all. I don't pine for no load of buckshot in my innards. Heave that anchor aboard, Jerry, an' git out the oars. Stand by the jib halliard, Bill. Now, shet up and listen good."

Thomas had forgotten that breathing was considered necessary to sustain life, but he held his

breath no more desperately than he clutched the branches upon which he was spread-eagled in this most unhappy plight. His weight was bending the fragile supports lower and lower, making it more difficult to retreat by the way he had come. And to advance was to land himself upon the open shore, a fair target for the men in the boat. While he was miserably wondering what could be done, the issue was snatched from his keeping. Shifting his weight to brace himself more securely, the overburdened branches tilted and snapped and his hands slid vainly along their slimy surfaces for a fresh grip. The law of gravity abruptly took charge of the fate of Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr., and with a cry of fright he slipped headlong and plunged into the shallow water, full tilt against the ragged coral reef. Even as he lunged downward he flung his arms out to save his head from striking, but the impact was so violent that he was stunned and could only flounder, in feeble, instinctive fashion, to raise his face above the water that was strangling him.

The crew of the "booze-boat" heard the startling commotion and were for instant flight, but their leader cried with a crackling volley of oaths:

"He fell in and hurt himself. Hear him splashin' like a turtle in a crawl? Served him right. I reckon he's drowndin' sure 'nough. 'Tain't none of our business."

"I'd put a load of shot into him to make sure," growled another, "but we don't allow to make no more racket than we can help. How about his comin' to and going back to camp? He may have been there long enough to know us if he sees us again."

"Oh, cut it out. Murder goes agin my stummick," spoke up a third. "We ain't afraid of the courts. No Key West jury ever found a Conch guilty of booze-runnin' yit, and I'm goin' to fish that cuss aboard. We can dump him ashore somewhere else and keep his mouth shet till we get clear of the keys."

The skipper objected, but his men sided with the soft-hearted person aforesaid, and two of them waded toward Thomas, who had been struggling more and more feebly while this argument raged. When picked up by the feet and shoulders he was at the last gasp and wholly unconscious. Bundling him into the cockpit of the sloop, the whiskey runners dragged the limp, pitiable figure forward out of their way and let him lie between the centreboard well and the canvas wall of the tiny cabin. They dared not make a light to ascertain how badly he was hurt, and were presently mightily busied with their own affairs; for from the shore toward the camp there arose the uproar of men embroiled in a dire quarrel, and the skipper exclaimed:

"There'll be no booze landed to-night. The jig is up. Our pals are in trouble, an' this key is too hot for us. Hoist jib and mainsail. Heave hard on them oars. Do you want a stick o' dynamite flyin' aboard?"

The sloop shot away from the shore, fled for the nearest channel between the keys, and once in open water caught sufficient breeze from seaward to make her heel with tautened sheets. Instead of heading for the wide spaces of the Hawk Channel and the quickest route for Key West, she dodged in among the maze of keys until her trail would have been difficult to find by daylight.

The crew watched the search-lights of the engineer's launches pencil the dark sky-line in random, bootless quest. Pursuit was a jest in this game of hide-and-seek. Presently the youth in the canvas cabin called attention to himself by incoherent, fevered murmuring. The man who had insisted that he be taken aboard crawled forward with a lighted lantern in his fist and called back:

"He is bloodied up powerful bad, cap'n. I reckon he stove his head against the reef. Where you goin' to take him to? He'll sit up and kick before long, and you don't want him to look us over by daylight."

The skipper ducked under the cabin roof and said peevishly:

"We ought to ha' left him where he was. I aim to get shet of him right soon. How about settin' him ashore on Little Spanish Key? He won't find his own camp in a hurry, and we'll have plenty o' time to git under cover and run this stuff ashore somehow. It ain't likely he'll remember whatever did happen to him to-night."

"There ain't nobody livin' on Little Spanish, is there?" asked the other. "There wa'n't when I went by there last winter."

"It's nice and lonesome," returned the skipper. "But some sponger or fisherman'll most likely take him off before he turns up his toes. Anyhow, the dog-goned fool is in my way, and he ought to thank me for not leaving him to feed the sharks. I'm soft-hearted as mush, I am."

Thomas heard fragments of this talk as if the voices were a great way off. He could not understand why Jack Hogan was not with him. His head throbbed with the most torturing pulsations and all strength seemed to have left him. Unresistingly he was moved into the cock-pit and propped against the coaming, while the most humane of the ruffians sponged his head with salt water and bade him take heart.

A little later the sloop turned from the winding channel and was hove to close to the low shore of Little Spanish Key. Two men picked up the Fresh-

man, waded to the beach with him, and left him lying beside a stunted tree above high-water mark, for all the world like a marooned buccaneer. The friendly rascal of the crew shortly returned with a small breaker of fresh water, a bottle of their villainous whiskey, and a basket of odds and ends of food.

The coolness of the dawn had fled and the summer sun was blazing high in the sky when Thomas Meserve sat up, gazed about him, and limited his remarks to a most emphatic "Ouch." His head still ached violently, every muscle had its own particular twinge, and he felt as weak as an infant in arms. At twenty years, however, a healthy youth can stand a deal of banging and his skull is not easily cracked beyond repair. Wherefore before he began to take stock of his woes this derelict swigged long at the water keg, topped it off with a heartening nip at the black bottle, and munched hardtack and a stringy fragment of ham with great zest. Bit by bit the events of the amazing night were pieced together, but of his voyage in the "booze-boat" his recollections were hopelessly befogged. He had been kidnapped and dumped upon a strange shore, this much was fairly obvious. But where was the key from which he had been snatched by force?

His smarting eyes beheld one low, ragged islet after another lying awash in almost every direction,

between them the marvellous green and blue and violet sea stretching in crooked channels, wide lagoons, and sparkling inlets. Far to the eastward glimmered a pearly fleck of sail, but the nearby waters were empty of craft. The castaway turned to survey his desert island and muttered disgustedly:

"If this is a bad dream, it is positively the worst ever. I wish Jack Hogan would roll over and kick me wide awake. Hum, more water-soaked scenery —millions of long-legged bushes just like I tumbled out of last night—and that is about all. Did I ever say anything about looking for adventures? Excuse *me.*"

Leaning heavily against the tree beneath which he had found himself, Thomas, the sorrowful knight-errant, descried a clump of tall pines rising from the further end of the key and wisely concluded that higher and dryer land must lie in that quarter. There was drift-wood lodged in the mangrove growth, some of it six feet higher than the beach, and the Freshman cared not to wait where he was until the next tide, lest it might confirm this ominous hint. Taking off his leather belt he looped it around the little water keg, slung the ends over his shoulder, and found that he could manage to carry the food basket with the other hand, not forgetting to tuck the bottle therein in case of urgent need.

Before getting under way he washed his head in the tepid salt water, and knotted his handkerchief around it to cover the scalp wound, which had ceased to bleed. Then wearily dragging one foot after the other, Thomas moved toward the landmark of the distant pine trees, his progress impeded by the loathsome luxuriance of the mangrove thicket. It was a heart-breaking kind of a struggle, and more than once he lost heart and slumped down in his tracks. Strength and courage were at lowest ebb when he came to firmer footing and a grateful carpeting of wire-grass in which sprawled clusters of dwarfed, saw-toothed palmetto. There was relief also from the stifling, choking heat of the jungle, and from the maddening insects which had filled the swamp. The exhausted pilgrim flopped down in the grass and lay with his head upon his arm.

There was no shade from the blistering sun, however, and the refugee dragged himself to his feet a little later and tottered onward, hoping to reach the distant haven of the trees and fashion a rude camp, although his knowledge of woodcraft was very meagre. He was an object to frighten and repel a respectable person if such there had been to observe him. Shirt and trousers were torn and splotched with mud and blood, and his countenance, unshaven for several days, was scratched and stained, while the grimy handkerchief knotted about his temples

lent a truly piratical touch to his singularly disreputable and forbidding aspect. In college Thomas had been scrupulously particular in such matters and the class-mates who had called him "the natty boy" would have utterly failed to identify him in his present plight. Not that he cared, for life had resolved itself into the elemental struggle for survival in which tailors and haberdashers are of no account whatever.

Having taken it for granted that the key was uninhabited, the Freshman came at length to a bit of rising ground and, propping his weary frame against a pine tree, gazed at a small clearing, a low-roofed cottage consisting mostly of wide verandas, and a wharf running out over a sheltered lagoon. The castaway was giddy and dazed by fatigue and hurts, and for the moment he could hardly credit his blinking vision. Mechanically clinging to his keg and basket, he stumbled down the slope, and drew near to a solidly constructed fence of barbed wire, the topmost strand considerably higher than his head.

This forbidding barrier ran far out into the water at one end and appeared to stretch around the clearing with no sign of a gate. Thomas looked in vain for tenants who might respond to his distress signals. He could think of nothing better to do than plod along outside the circuit of this cruel, impassable fence and curse the inhumanity of man.

The place was not deserted. The pineapple patch and garden had been recently cultivated. Hammocks swung in shaded recesses of the verandas, which were carefully screened against mosquitoes. A sail-boat and power-launch were moored near the wharf. A huge black cat strolled out from under a guava bush and insolently yawned at the wistful youth who was very near to weeping.

At length his progress was abruptly checked. Facing him was a sign-board nailed to a post a few feet outside the fence. Its lettering was bold and black and the message was startling, portentous:

> STRANGERS BEWARE!
> THIS PLACE IS SET WITH SPRING-GUNS AND STEEL MAN-TRAPS.

"Great Heavens," cried Thomas, his voice shrill with abject terror as if he had barely missed setting foot on a rattlesnake. Wheeling in headlong panic, he had bolted no more than a stride or two away from the fence when his foot was caught by a wire hidden in the grass. As he tripped and fell forward with no chance to save himself, a stunning report crashed in his ears, the smell of powder smoke was in his nostrils, and a jarring concussion seemed to pitch him to earth with tremendous violence. Dur-

ing the instant of consciousness, before he ceased to think and feel, Thomas knew that he had been ambushed and slain by a spring-gun. Then he lay as he had fallen, huddled, limp, inert.

CHAPTER VII

DRIVEN OUT OF EDEN

THE lethal weapon had gone off with a prodigious bang, shattering the dreamy quiet of the tropical clearing and the placid lagoon. A moment later, three persons rushed out of the cottage. The foremost of them was a girlish figure in white. Behind her lumbered a man of imposing girth and a crimson countenance who was bawling commands at the top of his voice. An elderly negro advanced more slowly, wringing his hands and uttering broken, fervent prayers as if he expected to behold a tragedy. The girl, who ran swiftly yet without awkwardness of gait, became hesitant as she neared the fence and gazed fearfully beyond. Catching a glimpse of the crumpled figure of the victim of the spring-gun as he lay in the grass, she gasped, halted in her tracks, and turned to cry in accents of grievous consternation:

"Oh, oh, father, what did I tell you? You have killed a man with your dreadful thing-um-a-bob. He is just as dead as he can be. I saw him. Go around to the gate, quick. You too, Levi. Bring

him into the house. I knew it would happen some day."

The portly parent was disobedient and tiptoed to the fence, where he puffed for breath. Then while the ruddy richness of his complexion perceptibly paled, he sputtered:

"I—I—guess he is done for, Helen. It was an accident, I swear it was. The confounded thing never would go off before, you know that. It—it was perfectly harmless. Maybe he isn't as dead as he looks, after all. Come, Levi. We shall have to carry him."

The speaker trotted heavily toward the other side of the clearing, followed by the reluctant negro, who was mumbling, while his eyes rolled heavenward:

"Good Lawd, please, oh, please, don't 'low me to be hung by mah neck till I'se daid. 'Deed I didn't set none of dem murderin' contraptions, an' I ain't killed nobody."

While these two sought the gate, the girl remained at the fence, as if fascinated and aghast, gazing at the ragged figure in the grass whose face was hidden. She noted the little water keg, the basket, and the black bottle, and murmured:

"One of those dreadful tramps from the railroad camps. He had run away and was prowling around our place. Of course, he intended to rob us and maybe kill us all to-night. Yet I cannot help feel-

ing dreadfully sorry for him. Dear father is so obstinate and he would insist on planting these infernal machines. I thought they were harmless until now."

She was too well poised and vigorous to become hysterical, although it was by no means a common occurrence to have total strangers potted near her door-yard in this very hasty fashion. Could the unfortunate Freshman have surveyed her very winsome aspect, more than likely he would have clean forgotten that he had just been blown from the muzzle of a spring-gun. In fact, one glimpse of her might have sufficed to make him grateful for the lamentable sequence of disasters that had brought him to this deplorable situation. He was totally oblivious of all things, however, and apparently as dead as the proverbial herring, which tactless performance agitated the stout gentleman a good deal more than his blustering manner had revealed.

The rescue party lugged the alleged corpse through the distant gate with much difficulty and laid it, or him, upon a cot in a small, unused room of the cottage, somewhat removed from the living quarters by a breezy interval of veranda. In falling, the late Thomas Winthrop Meserve had caused his scalp wound to bleed afresh and after a hasty, tremulous survey of the remains, his slayer concluded that the spring-gun had blown out his brains. This was so depressing a verdict that Mr. Stephen Eastabrook

sat down hastily, mopped his perspiring brow, and blurted to his daughter, who had joined him:

"Bless me, Helen, the damnable machine was so rusty that it simply *couldn't* go off. What am I going to do with this—with this—this—er——" Mr. Eastabrook gulped, lost color, and went on, "with this unfortunate person? Of course, he is a fugitive, homeless and friendless, probably a worthless, drunken scoundrel, for whom no search whatever will be made. It was a hideous accident, and —and there are no other witnesses. Need there be any publicity?"

His fair young daughter lost her temper and flung back as she fled in search of first-aid-to-the-injured:

"You talk as if you were perfectly willing to bury him alive. One might think I had an inhuman monster for a father. If you and Levi are too frightened to do anything, I will try my best to bring him to life."

She raised her voice in peremptory command and the negro servant showed himself, although most unwillingly. He was sent scurrying after water and bandages while the ministering angel ransacked the medicine cupboard, unable to decide what household remedies were best suited to mend a patient who had been bagged by a spring-gun at point-blank range. This delicate problem was solved by the victim himself, who sat up in the cot without

warning, wrathfully shook his fist at the quaking Mr. Eastabrook, and remarked in weak but emphatic tones:

"You tried to kill me, confound you, but you never touched me. I fainted, no wonder, but I came to while you were figuring how to dispose of my corpse. I heard you. Of all the cold-blooded——"

"I beg your pardon," gasped the gentleman addressed, and then he repeated the apology with tremendous solemnity, "I—beg—your—pardon. Really, this is a most delightful surprise. Are you sure you are not shot all to pieces? Oh, Helen, come here, quick, and bring me a drink of brandy, if you love me."

The daughter rushed into the room and at sight of the astonishing tableau dropped an armful of bottles, including witch-hazel, ammonia, and arnica, which smashed in common ruin. For the first time she perceived that the stranger was young, and that if his face were washed he would not be unpleasant to look at. In other words, the fact that he was indubitably alive shifted her point of view, and awakened a different kind of interest. Recollecting, however, that as a scamp of lowest degree he deserved no more than charity, she cried with some asperity:

"What do you mean by scaring us all to death? But you have been hurt. Your head is bleeding. Hurry with that water, Levi."

"What do you mean by scaring us all to death?"

Tom Meserve fingered his scalp with considerable alarm, eyed the girl admiringly, and huskily replied:

"That is another story. I hate to be a nuisance, but is it a bad cut? I can't see it, you know. And if it ought to be sewed up, I suppose I'll have to borrow a needle and thread and catch up with my darning."

The patient was swaying as he made this brave speech, after which he fell back and lay with eyes closed, too weak for more bravado. He had flared up for the moment like a candle in a puff of breeze but the effort had overtaxed his slender store of vitality. So near was he to losing consciousness again that he failed to hear the elated Helen exclaiming to her agitated parent:

"Wasn't he spunky? And he is nothing but a boy, father. I shall try to mend his head at once. Just you keep perfectly cool and help me all you can."

"A desperate-looking boy—old enough to pack along a quart whiskey bottle—and big enough to knock us in the head and loot the house if he had the chance," grumbled he. "I shall send Levi over to the chief engineer's head-quarters in the launch and ask him to send after this runaway hobo of theirs."

Miss Helen stamped her foot and frowned as she returned, most decisively:

"You will do nothing of the kind until this poor, wounded fugitive is able to walk. I never dreamed

I had such a brute of a father. There, hold this basin of water and keep perfectly quiet while I cleanse this cut on his head. It is more bump than anything else. Plaster will do nicely. When I have finished, you are to fetch some of your clean clothes and Levi will put him in bed. He did not talk in the least like a hobo, and his face is really quite nice and refined."

Mr. Eastabrook sighed explosively, cowed by his youthful daughter who had assumed command of the situation. A few minutes later she retired from the scene after issuing further orders with notable hauteur. Thomas was carefully ministered to and tucked into bed by the rejoicing Levi, who believed that he had escaped the gallows by a hair's-breadth. The young man slept heavily, hour after hour, in a kind of dreamless stupor, and the following morning had come before he sufficiently rallied to renew his interest in the surroundings. Then he was recalled to himself by a delightful flash of memory and his lips moved in the pious reflection:

"Goodness gracious, but I *am* in luck. I never had much time for the girl proposition, but this is different. She is an angel and a corker! I suppose the old man will throw me out before I have a chance to see her again."

Just then Levi entered and laid upon a chair the raiment belonging to the disreputable guest, every

garment washed, mended, and pressed, a deed of mercy which fairly astounded Thomas, who spoke his almost tearful gratitude.

"Don't thank me. It was Miss Helen what tol' me to fix yo' things all ship-shape," replied the negro. "Of course, I knows you is po' white trash an' don't look fo' no sich treatment, but Miss Helen is sof'-hearted that-a-way. An' we all is sure thankin' our Maker fo' not fillin' yo' system plumb full o' buckshot. My orders is to give you breakfas' in bed an' ask you is you still alive an' kickin'."

"I am not kicking so you would notice it," said Tommy, smiling with no resentment at being called "poor white trash," for he perceived that Levi had his own dignity to safeguard. "But I am afraid I shall not feel like moving on my way for several days. I am very weary and my head is a merry-go-round. Please tell the young lady that I thank her with all my heart and most humbly apologize for keeling over before I was hit and making such a footless nuisance of myself. I was never trained to be shot over by spring-guns, Levi."

"Well, I do declare, yo' conversation am right elegant an' scrumptious," exclaimed the old servant, who asked with childish eagerness, "Is you in disguise, please, suh? I kin keep a secret shet up tight in mah breas'. There ain't no railroad hands in dese keys what talks that-a-way, there sure ain't."

"Your failure to appreciate me at my true worth is a pardonable error. I shall not consider it a misdemeanor," impressively commented Thomas, thinking to bombard Levi while he had him on the defensive.

"Mistah Eastabrook hisself 'ud have to rise bright an' early to beat that 'sortment o' language," cried Levi. "How'd a couple o' fresh aigs an' a col' grapefruit an' a dab of guava jelly an' hot biscuit tickle yo' palate dis mawnin', suh? When I was mendin' yo' clo'es I had mah s'picions that maybe you was used to wearin' good clo'es. Now I knows it."

Levi bobbed his white head with well-trained courtesy and ambled to the kitchen, chuckling and talking to himself, as if he had shrewdly fathomed a secret of vast importance. As for Thomas himself, he had no intention of confessing that he was a truant, a failure, and a bit of human flotsam. His was no heroic tale to win favor in the eyes of a maiden, and his brief comradeship with Jack Hogan had given him more manly fibre. Thus far he had not even proved himself capable of earning the wages of a common laborer. With the unquenchable optimism of youth he expected to hammer out a sturdy career, but he was still a sorry kind of a joke.

As his mind cleared, he began to wonder what and who this father and his lovely young daughter

could be. They, too, must have suffered misfortune to be living on one of these tropical keys in the summer time. They were not natives, of this much he was sure, and the impetuous Mr. Eastabrook must have made a wreck of things somewhere else, or he would not thus have marooned himself and his daughter in this mosquito-cursed pineapple patch. Thomas meditated at great length for lack of anything better to do, until he was diverted by overhearing a dialogue wafted from the veranda. The lord of the cottage was emphatic and his daughter was insistent.

"I fortified the place to keep out those railroad ruffians," Mr. Eastabrook was saying. "I had to do it in self-defence. And now that I have laid one of them by the heels, the thing to be done is to get rid of him as soon as possible. You and old Levi have lost your wits, Helen. What if he does show a few signs of refinement? So much the worse for him. You can find every known kind of outcast among the riffraff on these keys."

"But he is no older than I," she protested. "And I am quite sure he is harmless. Levi says that he is grateful, and expressed himself in such a pretty, gentlemanly way. I don't want to adopt him, but I think we ought to take care of him until he is strong enough to return to work. Goodness knows we have few enough visitors, father, and I have been a

meek and dutiful child in exile. Can't I have him to play with for a little while, if he passes your inspection? You can trust Levi to know 'quality folks' every time."

Mr. Eastabrook grunted and rejoined with much heat:

"Helen, you are simply preposterous. You are to have nothing whatever to do with this young vagabond. And I shall put him ashore at the nearest camp to-morrow. The railroad has its own hospitals and the engineers take the best possible care of their men."

The stubborn and hard-hearted parent moved beyond earshot, and Thomas Meserve wore a sorrowful countenance. He had heard enough to convince him that he was to be expelled from this Eden, thrown out neck and crop, and turned adrift in disgrace. Making the best of his disappointment, he said to himself with a very wry face:

"Of course I was going to be on my way as soon as I could toddle. I belong with Jack Hogan and I must find him. But I don't even know the name of the key I left him on. And how am I to discover my own camp if there are five thousand men scattered along a hundred miles of these chunks of coral? Mr. Eastabrook may know his own game, but after wrecking my nervous system he might be less hasty in kicking me into the middle of next week."

Later in the day Levi shuffled in to inform the unwelcome guest that Mr. Eastabrook had taken his daughter for an afternoon's fishing in the launch, at which cheerless tidings Thomas said:

"I seem to be rather unpopular with the family. I thought perhaps Miss Helen might look in before night."

"She ain't gwine to git no chance, suh. I heard *him* tell her down on th' wharf to keep 'way from you entirely, an' he was powerful mad 'bout it, too. I reckon she's been argufyin' some mo' wid him."

"Well, then, if I am to disturb the family peace, why should I linger longer?" quoth the youth. "A day's rest and your excellent home cooking have made a new man of me, Levi. And between us, if I cannot see Miss Helen again, it is back to the galleys for mine. But I shall return some day, don't forget to tell her that."

"You mean you gwine fly th' coop right soon, boss?"

"Yes, if you can carry me to the nearest camp in the sail-boat, I'll set out this afternoon. I am not fit for work but perhaps I can keep moving long enough to find quarters somewhere."

Levi scratched his head with a dubious air and tactfully replied:

"Of course, we don't aim to be dishospitable, but you ain't a regular guest, an' the boss is almighty

sot in his ways an' sho' hard to budge. Th' skeeters, an' bein' poor an' trustin' to pineapples for his livin', has made him techy. Mebbe he'll be mo' happier if yo' leaves him yo' regards an' yo' compliments an' has impo'tant ingagements elsewhar."

"May I write a note of thanks to Miss Eastabrook?" asked Thomas, somewhat chagrined by Levi's ready compliance.

"Suttinly, suh. Yo' manners an' yo' feelin's do you proud. Th' sail-boat 'll be ready when you is."

"It looks to me like a put-up job," reflected Thomas while Levi went in search of stationery. "I am willing to bet that Mr. Eastabrook left orders to get rid of me this afternoon, while he carried her off out of range. Levi was all primed and waiting. Well, I can't help myself, but I am coming back some day if I have to swim for it."

It was a disconsolate young exile that meekly made ready to let Levi help him walk down to the wharf after writing a farewell in this wise:

My dear Miss Helen Eastabrook:

It is awfully nervy for a ruffian of a railroad hand to dare to address you, but you have been so good to me that I cannot help telling you how much it has meant to me. As your father sized me up, I am really down and out and belong with the hoboes, but I did not run away from my camp, and I had no intention of looting your house or your pineapple patch. I do think he was a little hasty in his judgment, and also reck-

less with his artillery, but my father is built very much the same way, and parents are sometimes rather difficult to handle, don't you think? I heard you standing up for me in great shape, and it made me feel better than finding a million dollars. You are just as good as you are beautiful, and that is about as strong as I can put it. I am ashamed to sign my real name, after making such a mess of things generally, and please believe me to be, with no end of admiration and a heart full of gratitude, yours most faithfully, until we meet again,

THOMAS WINTHROP.

The trim little jib and mainsail boat had tacked clear of the channel that led past Little Spanish Key and was footing it briskly toward the outer string of islets, when Thomas asked the natural question which had been much in his mind:

"It is none of my business, Levi, but what is Mr. Eastabrook's game? He is a Northerner and he doesn't look as if he were sticking down here for his health."

"Don' ask me, boss. I dunno," earnestly replied the negro. "He jes' finished fixin' th' place up an' sot hisself down like he 'tended stayin' fo' life. I reckon he ain't got money to live anywhar' else. I never asks him no fool questions."

"Where did he find you, Levi?"

"He done brung me from Key Wes', boss, whar' I was stranded, but I was raised in ol' Virginny."

Thomas was baffled and fell to brooding over his

own unhappy problem. To be set ashore in a strange camp, bereft of his right bower, Sergeant Jack Hogan, was an appalling prospect. And how was he to make his way from one key to another in search of his friend? This was even worse than being adrift in New York. Levi was sympathetic, but orders were orders and he was bent on finding the nearest construction camp by the shortest possible route. They had left behind them the unfrequented waters surrounding Little Spanish Key and were nearing the open sea, when Thomas Meserve scrambled to his feet, shaded his eyes, and cried out with amazement. Against the dazzling glory of blue sky and bluer water ran a long, low line of white arches, extending from one of the keys and boldly marching, span after span, sheer toward the unbroken horizon. Massive, majestic, this great viaduct, solid and durable as the rock upon which it was builded, rose from the battering sea as a unique achievement of faith and works. Tom whistled and cried delightedly:

"By Jupiter, isn't that magnificent? There is where I want to work, Levi. Is that viaduct finished yet?"

"No, suh, th' Long Key Viaduct ain't done, more'n half. It suttinly am a mighty piece of wu'k. It's too fur away to land you at. An' I dunno th' channel to it, nohow."

The passenger lost his elation. The sight of this

superb engineering feat failed to lighten the troubles of Thomas Winthrop Meserve. Levi was heading the boat for a nearby key upon which gleamed the tents of a grading camp. Just then there appeared from behind this island the tall funnels and towering superstructure of a stern-wheeled steamer, her low pressure exhaust panting loudly. Thomas snatched at a straw of hope and exclaimed:

"Wait for her, Levi. If that is the *Memphis Queen*, her captain can tell me where I belong."

The sail-boat shot up into the wind and drifted in the narrow channel until the steamer was almost abreast. Then Thomas made frantic signals and shouted so imploringly that the stern-wheeler slowed down and waited until the little craft had shot close alongside. Crawling out on the bow, Thomas jumped for the low guard-rail of the *Memphis Queen*, caught hold of a stanchion, and pulled himself aboard. Waving a hand in farewell to Levi, he climbed painfully to the hurricane deck and explained to the swarthy skipper:

"I have lost my camp, if you please, and I want to get back to it. You brought our gang down from the railroad two nights ago."

"Sure you are not a runaway?" queried the captain severely. "I like your gall in holding up my steamer. What's to prevent my chucking you overboard?"

Thomas had no answer ready and could only plead by way of explanation:

"I was trying to catch a booze-boat and her crew kidnapped me. I couldn't help it. If I can find my partner, Jack Hogan, he will tell you I am all straight."

The surprised mariner smote the lad on the shoulder, shoved him into the spacious wheel-house, thrust him upon a leather-cushioned transom, and exclaimed with excitable gusto:

"So you are Tom Winthrop, are you? The whole of Upper Matacumbe Key is looking for you. And you have risen from the dead and look most surprisingly spruce, as if the trip had done you good! Hogan was aboard last night, going on like a crazy man, begging me to take him down to Long Key and back. The division engineer took it to heart, and sick as he was, he was up and aboard one of the launches yesterday. Yes, indeed, I'm delighted to take you back to your camp. If those booze-runners had been overhauled there'd ha' been a lynching bee in no time."

Thomas was completely overwhelmed. He seemed to be returning in the role of a hero and he could only murmur with tears in his eyes:

"Good old Jack. But why did they make any fuss about me, captain?"

"Mainly because this Hogan man raised such an

infernal row about it," replied the captain. "He is a powerful trouble-breeder when he gets under way, and any one that didn't agree that the railroad must stop work without you, was in sore danger of being hammered to a pulp. The camp is demoralized. Oh, you are a leading citizen of Camp Number Eleven by this time."

Captain Canova left his mate to handle the steamer and commanded Thomas to relate what had befallen him, which narrative consumed so much time that the whistle bellowed for the landing before the whole had been told.

"You will have supper aboard with me next time I touch at your camp," said the captain, "and spin me the rest of your yarn about the fat gent and his beautiful daughter of Little Spanish Key. Why should I spend my good money to buy novels about dukes and castles and such when you are chuck-full of copper-fastened romance that beats anything I ever ran foul of? Come on deck and look for your big, noisy comrade-in-arms. He will be waiting for news."

The *Memphis Queen* sidled crab-fashion to make her landing. A crowd of laborers swarmed to meet her; for the day's work was done and it was the blessed cool of the early morning. At their head towered the martial figure of Sergeant John Hogan. The heart of Thomas Winthrop leaped at the sight,

and before he was within hailing distance he was dancing to and fro shouting himself breathless. The camp was no longer hostile, forbidding, isolated. This was like coming home, it was where he belonged, and although he was not old enough to know how rare and precious a thing it was to have even one such friend as he had won in the loyal sergeant, nevertheless he was supremely happy and content with his lot.

These two met on the gang-plank and Hogan was nearer blubbering than ever he had been in his iron-fisted career as he flung an arm around his young bunkie and shouted:

"You little divil, you. Are ye all here? Didn't they murder you entirely? I have been rampagin' like a wild man, and my heart was broke for sendin' you to your death."

"A trifle shaky, Jack, but all here," said the Freshman with a grin of purest joy. "I was unavoidably detained, but I had an awfully good run for my money. Shake the crowd and I'll tell you all about it. Whew, but I am certainly glad to see you."

CHAPTER VIII

THE GOSPEL OF HARD WORK

THE joy of Jack Hogan in the safe return of the Freshman was clouded by one disturbing factor. He wagged his head over the revelation that his young comrade had discovered a girl in his recent wanderings, and worse than this, that he blushed when she was mentioned and was unduly reticent concerning her charms.

" 'Tis discouragin' and I heartily dislike the symptoms," announced the mentor after they had talked late into the night. "I had hopes of ye, Tom, and the petticoats were the least of my worries, for I thought there were no wimmen within gunshot of this region. And you discover the only one of them without losin' a minute! I will see to it that you don't find her again."

Thomas looked rebellious and had no comment to make. It was evident that past experiences of Sergeant John Hogan had warped his vision and given him a pessimistic opinion of femininity at large. This wise man of the world had something

more to say with reference to the attractive damsel of Little Spanish Key, which comment he delivered with the air of one having a stern duty to perform:

"She may be as bewitchin' as ye say, Tom, and I take your word for it, but her old man is a bad lot. What would he be doin' under cover, tucked away on one of these God-forsaken reefs, with a complete system of fortifications, and wantin' to see nobody at all? Can ye tell me that? He was anxious to get rid of you, I notice. You say he is not a native. Then he has done something that makes him almighty unpopular somewheres else."

"Then his daughter ought to be rescued from such a life," cried Tom. "And you are the very man to join me in sifting this mystery to the bottom."

"Not on your life! Wimmen are all mysteries," sagely quoth the sergeant, "and now you are due to turn in and sleep yourself sensible again, you ravin' young lunatic."

Tom bethought himself to inquire for his other tent-mates, Fitzherbert and Jones, at which he was informed:

"Old Jones, the pen-pusher, was drafted off to help the storekeeper, and very glad I was, for he couldn't stand hard work. The Englishman is sweatin' with the concrete gang on the next key below, and will not be feeling very melodious by

now. You will rest up till you get your strength, Tom, and then it is the pick and shovel for yours. No soft snaps in Professor Hogan's college course for makin' two-handed men, mind ye that."

While he idled and recovered his strength, the Freshman had his first view of that part of the gigantic construction work which included his own camp and its hundreds of hard-driven men. They were strung along the embankment of limestone that stretched across the key like a white ribbon. Behind them the trestle and solid rampart of rock rose from the open water to link their work with the keys to the northward. Ahead of them other gangs were building the pathway for the steel track to carry it ever south, but the most impressive activities were focused at the great Long Key Viaduct.

Down the wide Hawk Channel passed one deep-laden tramp steamer after another, rolling home with material for this monumental structure, while there seemed to be no end to the procession of coast-wise vessels, tugs, and barges that were carrying concrete, steel, sand, and rock to Long Key.

Thomas was not surprised to find Sergeant Jack Hogan bossing a crew of laborers who were making a section of road-bed for the track-layers. And when he was fit to try to earn his wages, the youngster made never a "bleat" at being assigned to toil under this stern and impartial taskmaster. Hogan eyed

him grimly as the sweating novice tried to ease his blistered hands, or hobbled into camp at the noon hour, bent double like a rheumatic old man. Thomas might have been less docile could he have overheard the division engineer telling Hogan:

"I know pretty well what you can do. Your army record shows that you can make yourself very useful to me. And you don't drink. Just you stick by this work and you will not regret it. But how about this boy you have taken under your wing? I like his looks and he has been raised as a gentleman. He is bright enough to hold down an office job. We can use him in half a dozen ways. He ought not to be drilling along with the common tarriers. Better send him up to see me, Hogan."

The sergeant saluted and respectfully replied:

"If you please, and don't think me impudent, Mr. Carson, but the trouble with the lad is that people have been makin' it easy for him all his life. Let him win his promotion in the sweat of his brow. Turn him over to me for a while longer. I was looney enough to fetch him down here, and I'll have to square it with his daddy some day. Let him take his medicine. It's coming to him, sir."

The engineer smiled understandingly and had no more objection to offer. And so Thomas strove to "take his medicine" like a man, and day by day became browner and tougher and thinner, and felt

that he was earning his "one-seventy-five per day." Older and more muscular men fell out of his gang and were taken to the hospital, or ran off to Key West or Miami in whatever small craft they could hire from the natives, and after wasting their savings in dissipation, tramped it northward to spread more stories of the "wicked slave-drivers." They were men who had no stamina, they had drunk hard and lived hard, and this test weeded out the unfit, swiftly, inexorably. It put fresh heart into the stripling Freshman to find that he was holding his own and was able to stand up to his work in this tropical furnace of a place.

Whenever he become despondent because of utter weariness, Hogan was ready with a wise word or a caustic jest, nursing the boy along as a skilled rider handles a well-bred colt. Out under the velvet sky in the reviving freshness of night the sergeant sprawled on the beach, his pipe aglow, and told amazing tales of his adventures afield and afloat, and inspired other rovers to recount how strangely the world had used them. Thomas perceived that among these queer comrades of his there was no whining over misfortune, and that "going broke" was a commonplace incident. Their vivid narratives began with a certain formula varied somewhat in this wise:

"When I was busted in 'Frisco that winter——"

"I was down and out, all right, and sleeping on the Bund in Shanghai."

"Vera Cruz is a tough place for a white man with never a cent and no job, I tell you, boys."

Although these men were failures, reflected Thomas, they had a kind of invincible self-reliance that commanded respect. They had cast out fear and looked to-day and to-morrow in the eye without flinching. The remembrance of his whimpering panic at the thought of facing his college debts, and of a reckoning with his justly indignant father, filled him with a sense of shame. He had begun to realize that, after all, the campus did not hold a monopoly of the manly virtues, which serves to show that the rough-and-tumble educational theories of Sergeant Hogan were getting a grip on this pupil.

Thomas no longer talked about his own misfortunes. He did not expect to be sympathized with and coddled out of a "grouch." Unconsciously he was imitating the curt, clean-cut manner of speech of the sergeant in dealing with the men with whom they were compelled to associate, and he no longer slouched but walked, head up, shoulders well braced. In brief, the Freshman was ambitious of promotion and aspired to be a foreman.

At length Hogan came to him with the welcome tidings.

"We shift camp to-morrow. I'm going aboard

Quarter-boat Number Ten at the Long Key Viaduct, and you are to hike along with me. It will be livin' afloat, which is better than this hell-hole of a key, and I am to give you a small gang of men of your own to boss. You've made good, you tarrapin, an' the engineer speaks well of ye."

Thomas could have been no more genuinely elated had he been chosen to pitch for the Elmsford University nine. His face shone as he said:

"That is bully, Jack. Wait until you see the viaduct. You will be proud to help on such a job. And I am to move up a peg? Well, I didn't flunk my exams this time, did I? Do you know, I think it is about time I wrote a letter home. They must be worried about me, and this news will make them sit up."

"About time, you selfish young villain!" roared Hogan. "I should say it was. Thinkin' of yourself and never a thought for your father and mother! 'Tis like the sons of good men and wimmen the world over. Write that letter to-night or I'll black both your eyes for you."

Thomas dutifully foraged for pencil and paper, and while his intentions were commendable, the result was likely to prove most distressing to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr. It never occurred to their ingenuous offspring that they might fail to comprehend his changed views of life, or that

they would regard his success as betokening the most alarming degradation and hardship. With enthusiastic interest he wrote as follows:

DEAR MOTHER AND FATHER:

I do not quite know how to date this letter, but my next job will be at the Long Key Viaduct, somewhere off the Florida coast. I have been an awful shyster to send you no word before, but Hogan wrote you from New York and told you I was right side up. Well, I made such a mess of things in college that I decided to strike out for myself and show you that I could win. Hogan brought me way down here and he is the greatest man you ever saw in your life. We are building a railroad to Key West, right out over the salt, wet sea, five thousand of us, and I have been moving real estate with a shovel for one-seventy-five per day, just a common or garden tarrier.

Hogan has taught me something about handling men and I am to be made a foreman in a small way, so you see things are coming strong for me. I got mixed up in a fight with a bunch of pirates who were trying to run whiskey into our camp, and had my head cracked but soon recovered. Since then I have licked several Dagoes who got gay on the embankment, and Hogan thinks I am doing well.

I must tell you that I have met a girl who interests me very much. Not that I am really in love, but I expect to be when I see her again. This looks to me like the real thing. She lives with her father on an out-of-the-way key below here. He seems to be hiding there for some reason, and came near blowing me sky-high with a gun he had planted in ambush. But she is so good and beautiful and fine that I can afford to overlook a little thing like that, and she cannot be held responsible for him, anyhow.

Please do not ask me to come home now. I must stay here through next winter, or until the Long Key Viaduct is finished. I am as hard as nails, in love with the game, and stand well with my bosses. I hope you will write me, care of Quarter-Boat Number Ten at Long Key, but please don't interfere, will you? I suppose the horse-shoe nail factory is dead easy compared with this, but I am satisfied and happy, so what's the odds? I am going back to college some day, and am saving my wages to pay my own way. With love and begging your blessing, I am very fondly your son.

T. W. Meserve, Jr.,
alias
Thomas Winthrop.

When Thomas had mailed this lively summary of his achievements, Hogan asked what he had written to console and reassure his anxious parents. After listening to an outline of the letter, the sergeant gravely commended:

"I don't want to sound peevish, Tommy, but you have tossed a bombshell into that peaceful, genteel mansion in Cleveland. From what you have told me, your family is numbered among the tame and industrious rich who live up to the rules most particular. They lose the heir, he is mislaid in company of a rude and awful soldier man, and he is next heard of as a beast of burden in a railroad camp and proud of it. And to drive 'em clean distracted you have to shout it that you are in love with the daughter of an outlaw, brand unknown, and are

contemplatin' a mess-alliance that will tear your former social circles wide open. No, Tommy, your letter is divertin' but it would take a case-hardened liar to call it soothing. Such details as the episode of the booze-boat are what you call the high lights."

"Honestly, Jack, is it as bad as that?" anxiously queried the author. "I told them the plain truth. Of course, I am going to find that girl again. And I can't believe the old man is an outlaw. He is too fat and citified for that."

"Bank presidents are built that way. One was pointed out to me once, and he was a heap overweight, "declared Hogan. "Maybe this one looted the vaults and picked Little Spanish Key as the safest place to bury the gold until the smoke cleared away. However, your letter has gone, and good luck to it. From what I know about mothers, and I had one once, and a pig of a son I was to her, yours will be thankin' God on her knees that you are alive and well, and nothing else at all will matter very much."

Somewhat cheered, the Freshman fell to packing his slender kit for the welcome shift of base to Long Key. It was the *Memphis Queen* that carried the working force to the new quarters afloat, and Captain Canova hailed Thomas as he marched on board, and invited him to the exclusive realm of the hurricane deck. This master mariner of the railroad

fleet was a Cuban by birth, having learned to know the waters of the Bahama and Florida keys as a fisherman, sponger, pilot, wrecker, and steamboat man. Handsome, rather vain, a good deal of the dandy in his love of fine raiment, he was not such a sailor as you would have picked to fight his way through a dangerous situation, and Sergeant Hogan, violent in his likes and dislikes, had marked down Captain Rafael Canova as a "counterfeit." The less critical Thomas was of a different mind, however, and he frankly admired this dashing skipper who had so cordially befriended him.

"I was about to send a deck-hand ashore to find you," said he, as the Freshman perched himself upon the rail of the wheel-house. "I had to run down to Key West for some repairs and coming back to-day, that old nigger in the jib-and-mainsail boat was waiting on the edge of Hawk Channel, just about where I picked you up. He made signals and I slowed up while he tossed a letter aboard, tied to a bunch of oyster shells. I yelled at him that I wasn't running a rural delivery packet boat, but he just wagged his old gray head and batted his eyes at me and put about for the inside channel."

"W-was the letter for me?" asked the youth and his face was very red indeed.

"For Thomas Winthrop, Esquire, care of the *Memphis Queen*, and it wasn't a man's fist that handled

the pen," quoth the gallant skipper, pulling at his black mustache and standing very erect as if, forsooth, he was not unused to feminine attention himself. "I don't want to be cruel. Here it is."

He gave Thomas the envelope and the young man fled aft, forgetting to stammer his gratitude. It seemed incredible that Helen Eastabrook should have sent him a letter and he eyed the superscription as if this were a message from Mars. How wonderful of her to have thought of tracing him by means of the *Memphis Queen!* It must be in answer to his note of thanks and she was unwilling to let it be farewell! Perhaps she had need of him. Thomas sighed, smiled, very carefully tore open the envelope, and held the sheet of note-paper by the corners lest he profane it with toil-stained fingers.

The steamer was moving out from the lee of the key and as she turned to pick up the course past the buoys, her hull swung broadside to the whistling wind from the nor'east. A wicked gust smote Thomas unawares and whisked the precious letter from his fingers, drove it fluttering in mad career across the deck, and bore it like a feather through the wide meshes of the rail netting. Overcome with woe and consternation, Thomas emitted a wild cry of anguish, dived for the rail on hands and knees, fetched up with a resounding thump, and popped over the barrier, where he hung fast to a davit and

scanned the white-capped water. The letter was drifting astern like a fleck of foam, and only the sight of the huge stern-wheel, tearing the surface into thundering cataracts of spray, held him back from jumping overboard in chase.

His anguished gaze beheld the water-logged bit of paper whirl into the suction of the wheel and vanish forever more. Captain Canova had observed his mad rush across the deck and hurried aft, conjecturing that evil tidings had driven the rash youth to suicide.

"I hadn't read a word of it, and it blew away," faltered Thomas. "I am the most unhappy man in the world."

The captain clapped his hand to his heart and feelingly replied:

"They have made me suffer in my day. I can sorrow with you. It is the luck of the devil himself. I would lower a boat, but the love-letter has vamoosed."

"It wasn't a love-letter," mourned Thomas. "Not a bit of it. But it was terribly important, whatever it was. Oh, well, no use crying over spilt milk," with which he stuck his hands in his pockets and stalked below to find Jack Hogan, suddenly recollecting that he had been sternly schooled to keep his troubles to himself. He had no intention of confessing to the sergeant but that shrewd guardian read

the signs of distress and extorted the sad story by threats of bodily violence. He was not a sympathetic confidant, however, and exclaimed with a brutal laugh:

"What terrible trials children have, to be sure! So the wind blew all her pretty words away! 'Trifles light as air,' as the poet said, and me old captain used to spout him by the yard, whoever he was. 'Tis likely there will be many a shift of wind for you, and many a face you will forget, before you find the one girl that is waitin' for you, me boy."

"Oh, confound it, I am not as soft and silly as you think," angrily blurted Thomas. "Never mind, I shall get a boat and sail over to see her."

"Watch out that her old man has not planted his harbor with mines," said Hogan. "And as for your jumping your job to go romancin' off to find this young flyaway, you will not leave Long Key till I say the word. You are talking to your boss, understand."

The disgruntled Freshman moved sulkily away and chewed the cud of bitterness while the *Memphis Queen* slid over the opalescent shallows and drove the shining schools of flying-fish ahead of her blunt bow. It was firmly fixed in the stubborn head of Thomas that Helen Eastabrook had sent him some message of vital moment, and that she expected him to play the part of a knight-errant. And he would

be a craven, indeed, unless he responded in some way or other and with all possible haste.

At heart he was not really vain enough to assume that she regarded him with any sentimental eagerness to see him again, but one dreams dreams and builds romances at twenty, and Thomas was a normal youth. When it came to the point of disobeying Jack Hogan, however, and proving unfaithful to his trust as a man about to shoulder responsibility as a foreman on the Long Key Viaduct, Thomas found himself torn two ways, and in acute distress of mind.

"I couldn't find Little Spanish Key again," he said to himself. "And if I pick up a beach-comber to pilot me, Mr. Eastabrook will be madder than ever, for he doesn't want to be discovered by the natives. He put his house on the other side of the key to keep under cover. And if I do try to make the trip, Hogan will never forgive me, and I lose my job. All I can do is to sit tight and watch for a chance to send her a letter. Life is certainly a complicated game, no matter how you play it."

CHAPTER IX

THE REAL THING IN BASE-BALL

THE Freshman could not be utterly downcast for long. The Long Key Viaduct was visible, its arches marching along the horizon like some noble structure of the Rome of the Cæsars. As the *Memphis Queen* drew nearer, the manifold activities of the builders were apparent. The dry land was no more than a base of supplies. Men and machines were afloat, living and working in craft of every description. The unique flotilla dotted the sea—suction dredges, concrete mixing plants, schooners, pile-drivers, lumber scows, steam-ships, launches, and tow-boats, while moored along the shore of Long Key towered the uncouth, high-walled "quarter-boats" of the workmen. A vast and complex construction plant had been bodily shifted to salt water, risking hazard of hurricane, no longer an army but a navy of toilers.

This novel aspect moved Hogan to remark:

"Now I wish I'd served me time in a battle-ship instead of a rigiment. I never expected, so help me,

to run the risk of being took seasick in buildin' a railroad. We must get our sea-legs on, Tommy, and watch the barometer. 'Tis a great sight, and I'm glad I came."

Keenly interested, the Freshman followed Hogan ashore and carried his kit aboard Quarter-Boat Number Ten, which was lying abreast of the long, low sand-spit that formed the end of Long Key, and was somewhat sheltered by the landward arches of the viaduct. A two-storied house had been roughly constructed upon the stout hull of a wide-beamed barge. On the top deck or floor were cots for a hundred and fifty men, and below were the kitchens, offices, and the long mess-room. The breezes had full sweep through the long windows and the boat was airy, cool, and comfortable after the sweltering ordeal of living in camp.

With soldierly promptness, Hogan posted off to report to the division engineer for orders, and perhaps to slip in a good word for his protegé, while Tom dangled his heels from a window-sill and watched the crowded yawls come creeping in from the outer end of the viaduct, bringing the laborers to their several quarter-boats for supper. Hogan was so long absent that Tom joined the nearest squad at table and devastated the rough, hearty fare like a young giant. When the sergeant returned, his manner was as of one bearing weighty tidings and, haul-

ing the Freshman into a corner of the bunk-room, he eagerly confided:

"We have joined this web-footed outfit just in time. Our gang knocks off work to-morrow, for there is some trouble in sinkin' the caissons, and the rest of us are held up. Tell me first, and tell me true, Tommy, can you pitch a good game of ball? Ye have mentioned your pitching in college, but maybe it was as bad as the rest of your record."

"I was almost good enough to make the 'varsity nine," sharply returned the other, somewhat nettled by this slighting reference to his prowess as an athlete. "I needed a little more steam behind my delivery, but I think my arm would have been stronger by another season. What is the row, anyhow?"

"You have been making muscle since I took ye in tow, and I'm not afraid of your fading away in the pitcher's box," good-naturedly said Hogan as he gripped the youngster's hard biceps. "And I take your word for it that you have the curves and drops that's needed. To-morrow you will pitch for your life on a team picked from the quarter-boats. It will be a great occasion, Tommy."

"Do I have nothing whatever to say?" asked the Freshman. "Where and what?"

"This new division engineer of ours is a hot sport and a gentleman down to his heels," Hogan condescended to explain. "And he is fair perishin' to

see a game of ball. To-morrow he will give a holiday to the good-conduct men afloat and ashore, meanin' them that has stayed sober and can be trusted to behave. 'Tis a special reward of merit. There's some ball-players in the shore camp on Long Key and they've challenged us web-foots on the boats. It seems that we are shy of pitchin' talent and overhearing the lamentations of the bunch, I shoved you in the breach, and there you are. What's a college education good for, I want to know?"

"But we can't play on these keys. There isn't a patch of ground fit to lay out a diamond, much less an outfield," cried Thomas, his eyes dancing with the light of battle.

"The *Memphis Queen* will carry the crowd to Key West, Tommy. The engineer has already engaged the grounds that belong to the black-and-tan team that call themselves the Cuban Giants. All hands are betting their wages and if you're licked you had better step overboard and swim north with the Gulf Stream."

Thomas began to feel symptoms of dismay and hastily asked to be led to the captain of the quarter-boat nine, who was discovered on the beach where he was seeking to muster his men. He was a stocky, alert-looking person, no longer young, who introduced himself as Tim McFarland, of Quarter-Boat Number Ten.

"Tim McFarland," echoed Thomas, as they shook hands. "Why, it can't be—I read base-ball news when I was knee-high—and there was a Tim McFarland, the great short-stop of the Chicago League team."

"Which the same is yours truly," grinned the gray-haired gladiator. "What do you think they do with has-been ball-players, chloroform 'em? I had to make a living somehow after I lost my batting eye and got stiff in the joints. Foreman Hogan tells me you can pitch a few. The colleges play some good ball nowadays. Well, well, we have signed a great collection of base-ball discards for this game to-morrow. You can find almost any kind of a handy man in this outfit of hoboes."

Thomas looked solemn. This promised to be faster company than he relished, and he asked the natural question:

"How about the other team, Mr. McFarland? Who will pitch for them? You have me scared. Any more old professionals?"

The veteran short-stop winked mischievously as he replied:

"Nothing so very classy, barring the slab-artist of the Sand Fleas, as they call themselves. His name is Terry Flynn. He was a good one in his day, but rum threw him hard and he stayed down. He

looks like a soak now, but he may have one good game in him. The last time I saw him in action was in the old Atlantic League."

At this news the Freshman fairly gasped. Then this was to be no farce of a holiday contest. But he was not going to let Tim McFarland think him a coward and he nonchalantly observed:

"I might have known that there were first-class ball-players in such a crowd of men as this—all kinds from everywhere. Please introduce me to my catcher. We might limber up a bit before dark. This is a fine, hard strip of beach."

McFarland beckoned a red-faced, battered person who was chatting with a group of loafers sprawled out on a pile of timber, and remarked:

"The battery, gentlemen! Winthrop and Jenks. Clear the beach and watch 'em give you an imitation of Kelly and Clarkson at their best."

Mr. Jenks, who was a taciturn individual, produced a ball from inside his shirt and made ready to receive the bombardment bare-handed. The Freshman pitcher gained confidence after a few minutes' practice and was rejoiced to find that he could command more speed and accuracy than he had dared hope for. The catcher made wry faces and delayed to nurse his fingers while Tim McFarland beamed encouragingly and exclaimed:

"Not so bad for a kid, eh, Jenks? Better wait

till I can buy you a glove in Key West. The Sand Fleas will be kept guessing, just a few."

Thomas returned to Quarter-Boat Number Ten in high feather and wisely decided to go early to bed and leave Hogan to his own devices. He was sitting on the edge of his cot, gazing admiringly at the wonderful panorama of sea and sky framed by the nearest window, when the sergeant tramped in and earnestly declaimed:

"The Sand Fleas are coming aboard to make a friendly call and show there is no hard feeling. You will have to buck up and meet 'em, Tommy. They're good fellows, barring Terry Flynn, the pitcher. He is talkin' loud and hunting trouble, and he aims to shake your nerve. Don't mix it up with him, but don't let him bluff you, understand. You have plenty of friends. This Flynn is bad medicine, they tell me."

The wondering Freshman followed Hogan downstairs to the mess-room, just as the visitors clattered aboard. They were making a good-natured commotion and loudly declaring their intention of whitewashing the "Quarter-boats" on the morrow. The reception was cordial and noisy and Tim McFarland, after a whispered conference with the steward, showed himself to be an admirable host by setting forth a bottle of iced beer per man. Tom had prudently sought shelter beside Hogan, and presently there

swaggered toward them a tall, loose-jointed, surly-looking stranger who said with a sneering laugh:

"Is this the ——— college stuff we're going to knock out of the box? Say, boys, pipe him off. Oh, what a ——— ——— cinch. I'll bet you don't last three innings, Willie."

The comrades of Terry Flynn, quick to resent his flagrant discourtesy as a guest of the "Quarter-boats," yelled to him to keep his mouth shut, but he persisted in hurling more foul-mouthed taunts at the youthful pitcher, whose face had grown very white. Hogan was grasping his arm and whispering:

"I know you want to land on him, and I'd like to see you half kill him, but don't do it. He's a dog. Don't dirty your hands. Softly, Tommy dear. Wait till after the game."

The Freshman's eyes were full of tears and his lip quivered as he begged Hogan to release him. Tim McFarland stepped forward, disgust written in every line of his rugged countenance, clutched Terry Flynn by the collar, whirled him around with a terrific thrust and heave, then deliberately, methodically, kicked him to the door and down the gang-plank.

"I beg your pardon for doing your work," said McFarland, breathing hard, as he returned to confront the Sand Fleas. "But I seemed to be called upon to tend to the job."

"Right you are," replied the captain of the visitors. "I aimed to throw him out myself, but you moved faster. Please forget it, will you? We're sorry and ashamed. If he gets gay again, we'll tame him down a whole lot."

The Sand Fleas withdrew rather awkwardly and poor Thomas, finding opportunity to flee the crowd, marched off to his cot and slumped down, his face in his hands, sobbing aloud:

"I was making good on a man's job until now. And I stood up and let him call me vile names and never put my hands on him. What will the men think, oh, what will they think? And I have queered myself as a foreman, and nobody will have any respect for me."

Hogan had followed him, and stood beside the cot saying nothing for some time. Then as Tom looked up, his friend told him:

"You did the right thing. If you have to use your fists in the line of duty, 'tis well and good and I expect to see ye fight till you drop. But you are here to help me enforce discipline on Quarter-Boat Number Ten. And we will have no bar-room brawls aboard. The other men respected you, and you have not queered yourself. The disgrace is with those Sand Fleas for bringin' Terry Flynn with 'em. I would have smashed him meself but I will not have any one think I fight your battles for you.

You have stood on your own two feet till now, and ye have no reason to take on so."

"But—but he insulted me," wailed Thomas.

"He insulted nobody but himself and his friends, my boy. And your ball team will play for blood to-morrow because of this blackguard Terry Flynn. Out-pitch him, Tommy. That is how you must break even for to-night's ruction."

"Just you watch me, Jack. You have made me feel better, thank you, "and Thomas actually smiled. "I'll take the game away from him if it kills me."

CHAPTER X

A SENTIMENTAL INTERLUDE

THE *Memphis Queen* was steaming into the harbor of Key West, her decks crowded with tanned, hearty-looking men who were cheering and singing and raising such a hullaballoo in general that the natives swarmed to the water-front in unwonted excitement. The saloons hastily prepared for a thirsty onslaught, the gamblers made their lay-outs ready for swift action, and the hackmen drove their bony steeds toward the wharf at a gallop. There must have been a pay-day on the keys, surmised this hospitable populace, which had found the railroad laborers highly profitable visitors. This, however, was a novel invasion. Four hundred men had been given a holiday excursion with conditions attached, and they intended to make a record for sobriety and respectability. Sergeant Jack Hogan had been appointed provost-marshal and he had selected a dozen hard-fisted, muscular aides whose orders were to drag disorderly members of the party down to the *Memphis Queen* and lock them up in a spare cabin.

Tom Meserve had not slept as soundly as usual. This was more like war than base-ball, in his fluttered opinion, and it was nothing short of cruel to pitchfork him without warning into a game which, as likely as not, might wind up with more broken heads than base hits. The trip to Key West in the steamer was not reassuring. The rival clans carried banners, hastily made of sailcloth and stencilled by an artist of the repair shop with the spirited devices:

QUARTER-BOATS FOREVER.
OUR MOTTO,
WE EAT 'EM ALIVE!!
KILL
THE
UMPIRE!!!!!!

SIC 'EM, SAND FLEAS!
WATCH US HOP.
EVERYTHING GOES BUT
MANSLAUGHTER!!

Whenever Thomas cast a gloomy glance at these martial banners he shuddered and wished he had written a few farewell messages to his parents and such friends as might be interested to learn just how he had perished. It seemed hollow, bitter mockery to call base-ball a sport and a pastime. The terri-

ble Terry Flynn had been tamed for the time, but he took occasion to pass Thomas at close range on the deck of the *Memphis Queen* and scowled with the ferocity of a cannibal chief marking down a particularly juicy victim. It was a trying situation for a "college kid," as he had been dubbed by his comrades of the Quarter-boat nine, but the Freshman kept his fears to himself and refused to listen to the bantering sympathy of Hogan.

The steamer was almost alongside the wharf at Key West, her whistle raising a din of jubilant greeting, when a deck-hand ran after Tom Meserve and asked him to report to the captain in a hurry. As Thomas scampered past the wheel-house Captain Canova appeared from the starboard side, waved his arms in an eloquent flourish, and with a loud "hah, hah" of triumph indicated a small launch which was tied to a floating stage near the landward end of the long wharf. Bending over her engine was a venerable negro, and ever and anon he rubbed his head and made violent motions of anger and impatience.

There was no mistaking old Levi of Little Spanish Key, and Thomas sped madly to the lower deck, bounded to the wharf, and bore down upon the launch with headlong ardor. All thought of baseball was flung to the winds. The most urgent business on hand was to interview Levi. The Fresh-

man's heart jumped at the bare possibility that Helen Eastabrook might be somewhere ashore, but this was, of course, too good to be true. Levi looked up at the sound of scurrying feet and grinned amiably at sight of his master's unwelcome guest. He was given no time to frame a suitable greeting, for Thomas fetched up at the edge of the landing-stage with a loud cry of:

"Good old Levi! You look handsomer than a million dollars. Forget your fussy little engine and listen to me. I want you to carry a letter to Miss Eastabrook, sure. I don't suppose—that is—ahem —she didn't come—you left her well, I hope?"

"I didn't lef' her at all," said Levi, after straightening his aching back with a quavering groan. "She jes' now lef' me to wrastle with this yere fool injine. She went uptown to buy some goods at th' sto'."

"What? Is her father with her?" and the demeanor of Thomas was much less bold.

"No, suh, he ain't never come to Key West yit. He's powerful shy that-a-way."

"Which way did she go? Where can I find her?" The questions were fairly hurled at Levi's head.

"I reckon you can't lose her if you'se sot on meetin' up with her, Mistah Winthrop. You can't walk more'n a hundred an' eleven steps in Key Wes' without prancin' overboa'd which ever street yo' take."

"Well, if I miss her, you wait here and I will come back," shouted Thomas, as he bolted with head down, not into the nearest alley but plump into the waiting arms of Provost-Marshal Jack Hogan, who sternly declaimed:

"All stragglers and deserters to be rounded up at once, and no mercy shown 'em. I couldn't help hearing your farewell to the accommodatin' old colored gentleman that has gone adrift from Uncle Tom's Cabin. Right about, face. You *will* miss her, 'tis a safe bet."

"But this is the very girl herself! I must see her. Great Heavens, Jack, it is my only chance! Don't be so bull-headed. Let me explain." Thomas was squirming to escape, but his brutal captor held him at arm's length and replied with righteous indignation and inexorable firmness:

"If necessary, I will turn out the guard to lug ye to the base-ball field feet first. The team is hustlin' out there to practice right away quick. 'Tis no time to lose yourself and your wits flyin' after a petticoat. Have I hammered no discipline into you at all, Thomas?"

"I swear I will take no more than a few minutes. If you refuse to be reasonable, I'll refuse to pitch, that's all," sputtered the outraged Freshman. "Please, Jack. I want to explain that lost letter."

"And if she asks you to sit down in the shade of

a cocoanut tree while she tells ye the sad story of her life, you will fight no harder than so much putty, Tommy lad. But seein' as you're plumb distracted, I'll be weak enough to compromise. I will go with ye and find the charmer and I will hold me watch while you turn red and fall over your feet an' pass the time of day with her in a weak, falterin' voice. 'Twas years and years ago since I first had the symptoms but I remember 'em well."

There was nothing to do but accept these humiliating terms, for to combat the purpose of Jack Hogan was as futile as ramming a brick wall head-foremost. Very sheepishly and in sullen silence the Freshman trudged beside his keeper and swept the landscape with vigilant scrutiny in the hope of sighting Helen Eastabrook. When he spied her, she was coming toward the water-front as if finished with shopping, and Thomas muttered pettishly:

"Now break away, Jack, and don't spoil my game. I'll be good, and when you whistle I will say adieu to her, honestly. You certainly do make me tired."

The admirer advanced with outward boldness, tacked across the street, and was made no easier in his mind at hearing Hogan exhort him in a hoarse murmur:

"Throw out your chest and turn out your toes. You're all caved in."

Miss Helen Eastabrook stood stock-still, gallantly recovered from her genuine surprise, and was charmingly self-possessed as she smiled in recognition of this tall, tanned, fair-haired youth who cried before they had met:

"My, but I am glad to see you. This must be my lucky day."

"I seldom come to Key West, and I suppose you do not feel like making another call at Little Spanish Key," said she. "I hope you understood my letter. I tried to explain some things. I wasn't satisfied to have you think us so heartless and barbarous."

"I thought you behaved most beautifully, Miss Eastabrook. You were an angel, and—and——"

Her eyes mirrored merriment as she broke in to say:

"And father was Old Nick himself, but you are too polite to put it that way. He *is* trying at times. But you can forgive him, I am sure, after what I told you in my letter."

"Your letter, yes, indeed," stammered the Freshman, fairly cornered. "The trouble is I got it, but —but I never read it. You see——"

The chin of Helen Eastabrook was suddenly tilted as she looked straight before her and murmured in freezing accents:

"You thought it not worth while reading? Oh, dear, what a waste of time. I am utterly crushed.

I am sure I can't be worth while talking to. I bid you good-day, Mr. Winthrop."

"It blew away. I was almost broken-hearted. I nearly jumped overboard for it. Give me a chance. Oh, don't let us have such a dreadful misunderstanding," implored the culprit, marching doggedly at her elbow. "Will you not write it over again? I am at the Long Key Viaduct now. I have been thinking of you so much that I——"

"I don't care to have your opinion of me shouted all over Key West," was her scathing interruption. "That big, blue-shirted man across the street is listening and making queer motions with his arms. Is he one of your friends?"

Thomas glared daggers at the restless provost-marshal, and recalled his duty to the Quarter-boat nine, as he feebly answered:

"Yes, the best friend I ever had, but he is an awful bully. I have come down here to pitch in a base-ball game this afternoon between teams of our men. Hogan yonder wants to drag me off for practice."

Miss Helen was instantly diverted and exclaimed with impulsive eagerness:

"Isn't that fine! Do you know, I have not seen a good base-ball game in ages and ages—not since I went with father to the final Elmsford-Markham College match a year ago. Where did you learn to pitch?"

Thomas winked hard, felt his face become hotter and hotter, and almost revealed his own secret. Shame held him back from making a clean breast of it, but he could not help telling her, anxious as he was to be considered no ordinary brand of hobo:

"Oh, I played a little in college, but I didn't stay there long."

"There, I was sure you had been to college," she cried with an air of triumph. "I argued with father up and down, and Levi backed me loyally. I did not hear you say very much, but your few remarks were so delightfully slangy."

"Um, speaks well for a college education, doesn't it?" commented Thomas. "This game will not resemble an Elmsford-Markham contest. It promises to be a fine imitation of Donnybrook Fair. Otherwise I should invite you to see it."

"Could I not drive out in a carriage, with Levi on the front seat as chaperon?" was her exceedingly rash suggestion. "Really I am on a spree to-day, and ready for desperate enterprises."

"I don't know," and Thomas shook his head. "Perhaps you might drive 'way down into the outfield, far away from the crowd. My friend Hogan will see that nobody goes near you. But I am afraid——"

Hogan could be patient no longer. Advancing

with a most determined air, his hat in his hand, he bowed low and sweetly observed:

"I hate meself for intrudin', for I'd not blame any young man for walking a thousand miles to have a word with you, Miss, but the call of duty is trumpetin' loudly for this Thomas lad and I shrink from making a scene of violence. Play ball. Remember the motto of the Quarter-boats, 'We eat 'em alive.' "

This voluble manifesto was received in dead silence. Thomas was so taken aback that he failed to find words to express emotions of any kind and with a blundering, incoherent kind of a goodbye he was wafted from the presence of the amazed Helen, who said to herself, and her smile deserved Hogan's eulogy:

"There goes one man I should like to have father meet. It would be a famous bump. He has that poor boy as tame as a kitten, there is no doubt about that. And if Levi will let me, I am going to see that base-ball game."

To the almost hysterical expostulations of Thomas Winthrop Meserve, the sergeant paid no heed, but hurried him across the island of Key West in a forced march and safely delivered him to Captain McFarland of the Quarter-boat nine with the concise order:

"Take him and keep him. He is more worry than a squad of recruits."

An hour of hard practice made the Freshman forget that he had any other interest than base-ball,

and the loud praise of his fellow athletes gave him courage and confidence. As the hour of the game drew near, the spectators mustered beneath their respective banners and marched defiantly into the grand-stand, the hostile groups eying each other with great contempt. Larger crowds may have flocked to cheer contesting nines upon this tropic diamond, but certain it is that partisanship had never flamed more hotly than among this stalwart assemblage.

A Cuban player of local fame had been persuaded to take his life in his hands and essay the role of umpire. It was observed that his complexion became almost bleached after a hasty survey of the onlookers, and he pleaded a sudden engagement elsewhere in accents that were slightly tremulous. There was no sympathy with his evident eagerness to dodge his responsibilities and he advanced to his post of duty with the air of a patriot insurgent about to be led out and riddled by a Spanish firing party. Before this unfortunate umpire could cock an expert eye at the first ball pitched, a tumultuous Sand Flea roared in stentorian tones:

"I don't believe he is game, boys. We want nobody passing judgment on *our* world-beaters unless he has sand in his craw. Let's try him out."

With this the orator flourished a revolver and banged away at the official. At least a score of

shouting Sand Fleas instantaneously did likewise, unlimbering their artillery with admirable promptness in a crackling fusillade. The umpire delayed not for argument but sped toward the nearest gate in a series of frantic leaps and when last seen was careering along the highway in full cry and profaning the air with strange Spanish oaths.

"What did I tell you?" queried the Sand Flea aforementioned. "I told you he wasn't game. He might have known we were only wasting blank cartridges, but he was too scared to figger it out. Now, before we play ball, we want a real umpire, and that goes."

There ensued much loud wrangling and it was perceived that corralling another unbiased native would be no easy task. In fact, it was reasonable to assume that Key West base-ball talent would be considerably gun-shy. At length there emerged from the press of disputants a chunky, broad-shouldered, red-headed person who hitched up his khaki breeches with the air of a sailor-man and announced in thunderous tones:

"My name is Mitchell. I don't belong with either gang of you. I was workin' in Bahia Honda camp and I came down here and blew my wages and went busted. Being in need of a ten-spot I'll take a chance of your murderin' me, and I'll umpire this ball game. If you don't like my decisions, I'll be

ready to take you on, two at a time, after the ninth inning."

"Hooray for old Red-top." "You're the stuff." "Mitchell is good enough for us," shouted the approving audience.

This valiant volunteer strode to the home plate, rolled up his sleeve, tilted a battered straw hat over one eye, and growled between his teeth:

"Batter up."

CHAPTER XI

THOMAS PITCHES FOR HIS LIFE

MEANWHILE the Quarter-boat nine had taken the field and was broiling beneath the summer sun. The Freshman pitcher was the youngest of them all, a trim, lithe figure of a lad, clad in white ducks and a sleeveless shirt, his blond head bare. He looked around him at his comrades. They wore no uniforms, but even in their stained, patched working garb, their aspect was reassuring. Most of them handled themselves like ball-players and they faced the uproarious, menacing grand-stand with stolid indifference. Thomas Winthrop Meserve glanced beyond the field, this time with wistful, hopeful eagerness, but there was never a sign of the lady fair, and he turned to face the first batter, realizing how insane it was to expect to see Helen Eastabrook.

Crack! The stalwart third baseman of the Sand Fleas smote the first ball pitched and drove it at short stop, a clean hit but for Tim McFarland, the "has-been," who dived after it, achieved a miracle of a catch, and whipped the ball across the diamond

with the finished ease and certainty of an artist. One out, and Thomas thanked his lucky star for the heartening support of the veteran short-stop, who was capering a war-dance for joy that his skill had not forsaken him. The next man up was Terry Flynn, the Sand Fleas' pitcher, and remembering his blackguardly behavior of the night before, the men of Quarter-Boat Number Ten rose and bellowed:

"Soak him one in the ribs, Kid."

"Make a monkey of him."

"He is a quitter."

"You can scare the nerve out of him."

Thomas smiled and shook his head, but he felt a gusty wave of anger at the very sight of Flynn and was in danger of losing his hard-won self-control. Tim McFarland may have guessed that the youth was agitated; for he walked toward him and muttered:

"Steady, boy. Don't go up in the air. Take your time. Toss the ball across the diamond. Get busy with your shoe-laces. Don't let that mucker rattle you."

Grateful for this sage advice, Tom pulled himself together, carefully studied the pose of the waiting batter, and signalled Jenks, the catcher, who spat through his mask, and grinned his assent. The ball went wide of the plate and Terry Flynn looked bored and scornful as he growled:

"Afraid I'll hit it, eh? Just give me one little chance."

The slouching indifference of Mr. Flynn vanished after the second ball, which had speed and curve, and plenty of both. It swerved across the corner of the plate and the catcher grunted as it smote his glove.

"One strike," roared the dauntless umpire.

"Rum has spoiled Flynn's eye," loudly observed Sergeant Hogan, who let no chance for a temperance preachment escape him. "If he was properly tanked up he might see two balls and hit one of them. But he has no chance at all."

This truthful comment vexed Mr. Flynn and he was a trifle distracted, which Thomas was quick to note. He would strike out this blatant ruffian, he felt singularly confident of it, and his movements were calm and deliberate as he gripped the ball with sinewy fingers and swung his arm with every bit of strength at his command. Flynn's bat swished viciously but he was an instant too late, and the umpire, forgetting his neutral position, cried joyfully:

"Two strikes! Good for the tow-headed kid!"

Sand Fleas and Quarter-boats were silent. It was comprehended that the two actors in this thrilling duel had a personal issue at stake, and a rude yet chivalrous sense of fair play made the rivalry of the game itself forgotten for the moment. Tom was no

longer afraid of Terry Flynn, which discovery pleased and surprised him, and held him steady as a rock for the finish of the ordeal. Of course it seemed absurd to believe that he, a Freshman player, should assume to strike out this League veteran, but nevertheless—Thud!! He had hurled a wicked missile of an inshoot into the sure hands of Jenks, and Flynn had let it pass him without trying for it.

"Three strikes. Batter out," howled the umpire.

Flynn dashed his bat to the ground, wheeled, and glaring blackly at the self-reliant official, began to say:

"That a strike? You robber, I'll——"

Picking up the discarded bat, Mr. Mitchell stepped forward, not in a flurried fashion, but very rapidly, and poked the critic in the stomach so that he sat down abruptly and was too busy gasping for breath to venture further comments.

"The next time you let out one whisper, you will get the thick end of a bat behind the ear, and your team will find another pitcher, see?" said the umpire.

The Sand Fleas protested at having their star performer crippled but they subsided as soon as Terry Flynn hobbled to the bench and showed some interest in the incidents of the game. The elation of Thomas was somewhat tempered by a two-bagger as neatly achieved by the captain of the Sand Fleas, but the inning ended with no runs made, and excite-

ment was already at high-water mark. Now it came the turn of Terry Flynn as pitcher to wreak a masterly revenge, and he had so far recovered from the umpire's forceful admonition that he prevented the Quarter-boats from scoring and had the peculiar satisfaction of throwing Thomas out after a puerile attempt at a bunt.

After several innings, during which fielding errors and timely hitting gathered runs for both teams, the score see-sawed into the seventh, where it was tied at 6—6. Never in his base-ball career at college had the Freshman pitched with so much cool-headed efficiency, nor had his endurance begun to flag. Terry Flynn, the terrible, was showing signs of wear and tear, yet the skill and strategy bred of long experience as a professional enabled him to extricate himself from tight corners and to baffle the amateurs who faced him.

Tom Meserve was trudging over to the bench after pitching a strenuous inning, when no fewer than three carriages entered the gate and halted at some distance from the crowd. He rubbed his eyes, for he had fondly hoped to see no more than one. Presently several gentlemen of solid, prosperous appearance alighted and waited while one of their number assisted a girl of engaging beauty and escorted her to a station near the out-field. Thomas gasped at recognizing Helen Eastabrook attended

by this distinguished-looking body-guard and was sorely puzzled. His confusion was made worse when Hogan came down from his perch and brought this information:

"Our engineer boss at Long Key has gone over to meet them. I heard him say it was the president and the general manager of the road, and the chief engineer of construction, with other big bugs. 'Tis an inspection party. They have just come down from the keys in the president's yacht. Now play ball, or you will lose your job."

"Ball be hanged! What in the world, what—what—is *she* doing with them?" implored Thomas, his eyes fairly bulging. "Who is she?"

Ever ready with a hair-trigger solution of any problem, Hogan promptly answered:

"Easy enough, Tommy. They knew her father before he looted the bank, and they are tryin' to extract the dark secret of his present whereabouts from her. Where is he at? 'Tis a most distressful accident for her that she met up with them at all, you may be sure. Maybe they are holdin' her as a hostage, I dunno. But it is more'n half likely. I told you he was a fat outlaw. And the poor girl is discovered."

"Oh, bosh, Jack. The mystery is thicker than ever. Heavens, it is my next turn at bat and I am clean up in the air."

In a fog of surprise and bewilderment Thomas strode to the plate, helpless to hit anything smaller than a toy balloon, and gazed at Terry Flynn with an absent smile. That he miserably struck out goes without saying, and as he slunk back to the bench, the angry voice of Hogan hissed in his ear:

"I am ashamed of you. I thought I was making a man of ye, you whimperin', useless lump of putty. And the girl had her two eyes on you waiting for that home run she expects you to make for love of her. Get to it."

The word had been passed through the grandstand that the group of sedate gentlemen standing at the edge of the field comprised the highest officials of the railroad and the construction work, and the untamed crowd would have been diverted to hear the general manager say to the division engineer, who greeted him:

"We happened to discover a wild-eyed Cuban who looked as if he had run himself to death. He was delivering an oration in front of a cigar store, and we gathered from his incoherent remarks that he had been trying to umpire a game between teams from the keys. So we drove out to see the fun. Any blood spilled so far?"

"No, the men are behaving beautifully, sir. They are a picked lot and really they had earned a holiday

spree. Would you care to take seats in the stand? The finish of this game is likely to be a corker."

The general manager turned to the white-haired president and asked:

"How about making ourselves comfortable and getting a better view? This is base-ball worth coming to see. I had no idea there was so much talent in the camps."

The president's eyes twinkled and he needed no urging, but he looked at Helen Eastabrook as he replied:

"Do you think the language will sound precisely conventional at close range?"

The division engineer took it upon himself to reply:

"I will answer for the men, sir. The sight of the lady herself will be enough."

As the party moved toward the grand-stand, the general manager asked:

"By the way, who is the youngster pitching for the Quarter-boat gang? I don't remember seeing him in camp. What is he doing?"

"He reported to me only yesterday. Carson sent him down from Upper Matacumbe Key with a note advising me to push him ahead. He is chumming with a first-rate foreman, Hogan, an old regular army sergeant."

They were passing behind third base and Hogan chanced to be helping coach a fleet-footed Quarter-

boat runner who had just slid from second in a cloud of dust. The division engineer lowered his voice and went on:

"Here is Hogan, now. The big chap in the blue shirt. He can tell you all about the young pitcher."

"I will see him after the game. What is the name of the lad, do you happen to know?"

"Winthrop, he calls himself, sir."

"U-m, I was about to send an order to have him looked up." The general manager halted long enough to take a letter from his pocket and read it hastily, after which he remarked:

"Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr., is the young man I am requested to find. This is from his father. I am to ship him home to be spanked. Glad I don't have to do the spanking. He looks as hard as nails."

Now Hogan, absorbed in his noisy task, heard none of this conversation, but there followed a brief lull and he did overhear Miss Helen Eastabrook exclaim in most indignant accents:

"I think it a perfect shame. It is worse than that. Outrageous, I call it. No matter what he has done, he ought to be allowed to make his own choice. This is treating him like a criminal. Really, I feel obliged to intercede. He is trying to atone for his past and is as manly as can be about it."

The little group moved on while the general manager, quite taken aback, apologized for stirring up

such a tempest and asked Miss Eastabrook how in the world she happened to be interested in the fortunes of this attractive derelict. Hogan, however, heard nothing of the explanation, and jumped to the natural conclusion that Helen had been pleading in behalf of her father. The sergeant sorrowfully shook his head and muttered to himself:

"I told you so. I was right on the very first guess. The big railroad boss knows the dark secret and the poor girl is worried distracted for fear he may pry the old man loose from his hidin'-place. And she was beseechin' him to have mercy! Oh, dear, oh, dear, this will be cruel news for Tommy. I will hold it up for now. So the fat pirate is busy keeping out of jail. There's a proper father-in-law for ye, Thomas, me lad. Another bomb-shell for the gilded mansion in Cleveland."

Ignorant of this harrowing revelation, Thomas went in to pitch just as the visitors were climbing to an empty corner of the grand-stand. The Sand Fleas had gained a lead of one run and the game was in the eighth inning. The Freshman's wits were somewhat confused, for he could not be oblivious to the "girl proposition," and he gave two bases on balls before settling down to pitch a whirlwind finish. Then, alas, the Sand Fleas fell upon him with wicked onslaught and drove out three hits which brought home two runs before the bombardment

was checked. Thomas was perspiring and wilted as he sought Tim McFarland and begged him to pitch out the final inning.

"Nonsense, you aren't dead yet," exclaimed the veteran. "This crowd of ours expects you to pull the game out, and Heaven help you if you don't. Terry Flynn is about due to blow up. His knees are wobbling. Don't lose your sand."

The familiar word stung the Freshman to the quick. "Sandless" was what he had been in college and the lack of sand had made him a fugitive. Unwittingly, Tim McFarland had said precisely the right word in due season. Thomas chewed his lip and sat with fists clenched while McFarland, by way of showing that he practised what he preached, strolled to the plate, gripped his bat with nonchalant bearing, and promptly whanged the ball into deep right field for two bases. The Quarter-boats stamped and roared and the flimsy grand-stand creaked and swayed. Their standard-bearer charged out on the field and displayed the terrifying legend which the stormy partisans chanted in deep-throated unison:

WE EAT 'EM ALIVE.

The coaches bellowed and shook their fists, earnestly striving to avoid epithets that might shock a lady's ears, but breathing sudden death and destruc-

tion nevertheless. Luck and a brief panic among the infielders gleaned two runs for the Quarter-boats and the eighth inning ended with the Sand Fleas only one run ahead. Thomas dared not look for some sign of recognition from Helen Eastabrook. He had failed at everything else he had ever undertaken and it looked as if he were to be whipped even as a base-ball player.

Hogan gripped his hand as the Quarter-boats were about to take the field for the first half of the ninth inning and whispered:

"You admired me, Tommy, the first day we met, because the harder I fell the higher I bounced. 'Tis going to be the same with you. I have tried to show you all this time that a good man is never licked till his friends have to send for the undertaker."

The Freshman smiled, swallowed a lump in his throat, and took his position, ready for the last opportunity to show his mettle as a pitcher in this contest that seemed so vital to him. Fortunately the Sand Fleas had worked toward the tail-end of their batting list in the preceding inning, and there were no old professionals to match their cunning against his skill. To the honest amazement of Thomas he struck out two men with automatic precision, but he was not yet out of the woods. The left-fielder juggled an easy fly for a harrowing instant and dropped it. Then Thomas himself slipped and

fell in trying to scoop up a bunt, and two runners were on the bases. It was even more disconcerting to have the umpire call "four balls" on the next batter, and the bases were filled.

Now came the terrible Terry Flynn to the plate, and the immortal Casey himself could have appeared no more insultingly confident of making nothing short of a clean home-run. Sand Fleas and Quarter-boats had swarmed out of the grand-stand and were crowding and jostling toward the base lines. The din was deafening. The truculent umpire was as calm as a May morning, but he clutched a heavy bat and was prepared to sell his life dearly. Thomas Meserve glanced at the bases and at the capering, yelling runners who were shaking their fists at him. Flynn grinned derisively and asked the Freshman to "toss it over before he fainted dead away."

A few moments later, Tim McFarland was murmuring in a dazed kind of fashion:

"Three balls and two strikes, and the bases filled. And a doctor once told me my heart was weak! If I live through this, I'll telegraph him that he is seven kinds of a liar."

The emotions of Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Jr., were beyond all analysis. He pitched the crucial ball and Terry Flynn hit it. Thomas intuitively threw up his right hand, felt a cruel stab of pain, saw the ball fall at his feet, blindly dived for it, and

flung it at first base. Terry Flynn was thrown out by a hair's-breadth and the peril was past. The pitcher fought off the rampant Quarter-boats who were thumping him breathless and implored:

"Go easy. I broke two fingers, but it was worth it."

"I never thought you could stop that ball. It was due to keep on going till it hit salt water," said McFarland. "We'll carry you to a doctor in a jiffy."

"Not until you bat this game out," said Tom. "*Now, you have got to win it.*"

He sat down feeling weak and unstrung, while Hogan, a rough-and-ready surgeon of no small skill, investigated the damaged fingers and improvised a splint.

"I am afraid I can't go to bat this time," mourned the Freshman.

"But you made base-ball history for the island of Key West," was Hogan's cheerful comment. "For once in me life I would ha' ducked if that ball you stopped had been aimed my way. And the big boss himself saw you do it, and there will be no trouble about your layin' off to mend your fingers. I will not mention the girl. 'Tis not the proper time."

Thomas was about to ask why, but the Quarter-boats were ready for action, with two runs to make to win in the last half of the ninth inning.

"I was hoping to make a home run and be a real hero in a neck-and-neck finish," sighed the cripple. "But Tim McFarland will have to wind it up with one of his famous, old-time sensations."

The nerves of pitcher Terry Flynn had been severely taxed and he was a pitcher that had gone too often, not to the well, but to the bottle. Victory had seemed certain for the Sand Fleas until the Freshman turned the tide earlier in this final inning. Now the issue was in doubt, and Flynn was not the man to fight his way out of a desperate situation. He had been out-pitched and out-played by the despised "college kid" and his confidence in himself was shaken. The Quarter-boats hated him to a man, and he had lost the respect of most of his own comrades.

As if they had fathomed his forebodings that his Waterloo impended, the Quarter-boat batters went after his delivery with savage, gleeful energy, taking long chances, reaching for balls that they ought to have let alone, hammering out long flies, sizzling grounders, deadly drives across the infield, a veritable fusillade. The pitcher had gone to pieces in the last ditch, and although his fellows stood up nobly under fire and fielded really better than they knew how, the game had been wrested from their hands. As if it had been foreordained, Tim McFarland made the spectacular home-run which rang

down the curtain and made the doughty Quarter-boats handsomely victorious.

Thomas had been nursing his aching fingers, regretting that he could have no part in this joyful finale, and wondering how he might have a word with Helen Eastabrook. Alas, he was only a humble laborer in a vast army of such, and it would be rash presumption for him to venture to address her in the presence of her high-and-mighty escort. This depressing train of thought was abruptly derailed when the tumultuous crowd of quarter-boat men came rushing toward him like a land-slide, the members of the nine in the van, and acclaimed him as the hero of the engagement. They were for hoisting him upon their shoulders but McFarland yelled:

"Don't jolt him, boys. No rough-house. He is bunged up."

"Then we'll carry him to town all ship-shape and elegant," shouted somebody else, and there was a scramble for the fence, a section of which was plucked up by the roots. Strong arms carried this spacious stretcher, a dozen coats were flung upon the planks, and with no chance to protest, Thomas was carefully seated thereon and borne from the field to the accompaniment of a far-resounding chorus:

There'll be a hot time in the old town to-night.

The Sand Fleas, good sportsmen that they were,

trailed behind, and the hero was whisked from the field and into the highway like a Roman general returning from a field of glory in his litter. The division engineer, who had hastened to find Thomas with a message from the general manager, viewed the demonstration, hesitated, and was baffled, for it would have taken a battering-ram to make a path through this close-packed, howling mob four hundred strong. Chagrined, he retreated to report to the general manager that the young man had been snatched away beyond recall, and that he would be held for orders after his return to Long Key.

"Right you are," said the general manager. "We have no time to head him off at the steamer. We were due at the conference with the War Department officials at the barracks fifteen minutes ago. I plead guilty. That ball game was something to remember. And that youngster has good stuff in him. I shall be sorry to lose him from your payroll."

Helen Eastabrook, who was an intensely interested listener, looked confused and kept silent. She had been forward and impulsive in defending poor Thomas and she must be more discreet. To herself, however, her native candor compelled her to confess that she was unhappy at the thought of seeing the boyish, attractive fugitive no more among the keys. He was to be whisked from this romantic,

tropical world, far away to his own people, and there would be no more letters, no more chance meetings, no more adventures, and he would straightway forget the girl he had met on Little Spanish Key.

CHAPTER XII

ON QUARTER-BOAT NUMBER TEN

The general manager of the Florida Railway and Navigation Company was an extremely busy man, burdened with vast responsibilities; for to him had been entrusted the supervision of the extension of the system to Key West. He commanded both an army and a navy, and every day brought a myriad details and anxieties, and of these, perhaps the least important was the fate of Thomas Winthrop, so-called. He intended sending a written order to Long Key to have the young man shipped to Jacksonville in charge of a trustworthy keeper, and it was also his purpose to telegraph the father of the fugitive to meet him there. Urgent business called the general manager to New York, however, immediately after the cyclonic base-ball game, and he forgot the matter for the time.

The division engineer at Long Key was a methodical person who waited for the written order which failed to arrive, and meanwhile said nothing to Thomas, who rejoined Quarter-Boat Number Ten

and dutifully toiled and royally bossed his crew of men who were handling material upon the viaduct. They overlooked his youth and were cheerfully obedient because he had won their respect and was rated a man of courage and strength who had played base-ball like a master and won shining renown for his comrades.

Hogan was proud of this bantam of his and swore there was never a lad like him. They had one very painful interview which fell little short of a quarrel when the sergeant related, with solemn emphasis and a very long face, the damning facts gleaned from the outspoken protests of Helen Eastabrook, which he had overheard at the base-ball field. Hogan was stubbornly certain that his theory concerning that "fat outlaw," Mr. Stephen Eastabrook, was confirmed thereby, while Thomas, flinging reason to the winds, passionately declared that a girl as beautiful and as altogether perfect as he knew Helen must be, could not have a scamp and a fugitive from justice for a father. He was inwardly disquieted, nevertheless, and was so low-spirited for some time thereafter that Hogan was smitten with contrition and tactfully weakened enough to declare:

"I'll agree to suspend judgment. I'll even say that her old man is a leadin' philanthropist, heavily disguised, who is doing missionary work among these heathens down here, if only you will chirk up, Tom-

my, and look less like a dyin' sheep. You put a crimp in my appetite. Smile, for the love o' Heaven, smile before you forget how."

Thomas coaxed a smile or two, smothered his sighs, and fell to planning how he might make a landing at Little Spanish Key and meet Helen without running afoul either of a spring-gun or of Mr. Stephen Eastabrook, who could be classed as an explosive machine even more dangerous.

The fates so ordered it, however, that the Freshman was never again to find his way to that enchanted perilous islet and there behold the princess who dwelt in the pineapple patch guarded by its barbed-wire rampart and the roaring dragon of a parent. It befell one sultry evening that he was lounging on the balcony of Quarter-Boat Number Ten chatting with Hogan and a group of their ship-mates who were restlessly complaining of the smothering, windless heat. The breeze which usually swept in from seaward after twilight had suddenly died. The stars that shone so large and lustrous in this soft, tropic sky were dimmed in a curious, filmy mist. The song of the surf on the outer barrier of keys was unusually loud, although the sea slept almost without swell or ripple. A brawny derrick-man ripped open the collar of his shirt and exclaimed:

"The life is all gone out of me. The air is dead. I was caught in a hurricane in Barbadoes once when

I was building a dock, and blow me if it didn't feel just like this before she struck us."

"A hurricane wouldn't do a thing to these keys and the whole works," said another voice. "I've thought of it many a time, haven't you, boys?"

"The engineers figured it all out, you bet," cried Hogan. "They aren't spending ten million dollars to have it blown away in the first big wind. They are plenty wise enough to make the job hurricane-proof or they wouldn't be here. 'Tis a rippin', rampageous, murderin' night, right enough, for heat and mosquitoes. But I'm going to sleep on this quarter-boat with never a thought of hurricanes. Hullo, who is that coming aboard? They just passed from under the arc light. Looked like Fitzherbert and old man Jones, Tommy."

Presently the tall Englishman strolled out on the balcony and sat upon the railing while Jones unobtrusively stood in a shadowy corner. The sight of them recalled to Thomas his first hours on the keys. It seemed years since that wretched, hopeless journey from New York.

"Singing any songs these days, Fitzherbert?" asked Hogan. "Can't you give us a ditty to make us forget our troubles?"

The Englishman said nothing but straightway began to sing "Robin Adair" and the rough company listened in silence, nor was there any loud talking

after the song was done. Tom felt a hand on his sleeve and turned to face Jones, the old book-keeper, who whispered:

"I found Fitzherbert in Key West, wages all gone, down and out. He had pawned his coat for rum and was sitting on a wharf late at night singing to break your heart. He is very much the gentleman, is Fitzherbert, drunk or sober. I have become quite fond of him. He once held the Queen's commission in a cavalry regiment, in the Soudan, and all that."

"What is he doing now—still on the upper stretch of work?" asked the Freshman.

"No, he went straight for a while and was shifted in charge of a cement mixing plant with the floating equipment. His barge is out near the end of the viaduct, towed there yesterday. I am still at the old camp, but I am hung up here for to-night. Have you a spare bunk?"

"Plenty of them. Help yourself, Mr. Jones. S-s-sh, Fitzherbert is singing 'Kathleen Mavourneen.' He will make me cry like a child if I don't watch out. My stars, what a voice!"

One song followed another, and several voices, strong and true, picked up the refrain, until men from other quarter-boats began to come on board to listen to the sentimental concert. Before long a messenger came from the division engineer's head-quarters with an order which hastily dispersed the company:

"Make everything fast as soon as possible. Secure all floating equipment with double moorings. Every man will at once report to his own foreman and stand by."

"What did I tell you?" cried one of the men. "The tip is out for a hurricane, and God help them that can't swim."

"Oh, shut up. We want no false alarms," growled Hogan. "The assistant engineer boss of Number Ten is away for to-night and he won't venture back if the weather looks too heavy for his launch. That puts me in charge and every man that doesn't belong aboard here will vamoose. Our gang will jump ashore to make all fast, and clear away all loose material and pick up odds and ends. Come on, Thomas, fetch your boys along."

"I must be getting back to my barge," said Fitzherbert. "Jones, you had better stay aboard the quarter-boat to-night."

"But your barge may go adrift if it blows hard," timidly objected the book-keeper. "Why not stay here?"

Fitzherbert laughed and called back as he ran for the beach:

"I fancy I'll stand by my ship while she floats."

He was singing when they last saw him, and presently they heard him still singing as he rowed his skiff over the quiet water where the electric lights of

the huddled flotilla of dredges and barges spattered the darkness with starry scintillations. Tim McFarland, a man to stand at Hogan's right hand in any emergency, indicated the many craft far out along the viaduct and said as the quarter-boat crew scrambled ashore:

"We can't do anything worse than get piled up on the beach, but if those lads yonder begin to drift they will be smashed into kindling-wood, between colliding with each other and ramming the viaduct, eh, Jack?"

"There's half a mile of shoal water to break the seas and it would take a bigger wind than you or me ever saw blow to pull them loose, Tim. But between us, I wish our two-story hotel was fastened to a good, deep stone cellar."

An hour later the division engineer visited the quarter-boat and inspected the provisions made for its safety. The men crowded around him and clamored for news of the weather. Some of them were already timorous and begged to be shifted to the camp ashore. The engineer was imperturbable and listened attentively to the eager questions hurled at him. At length, he made answer with deliberation, as if carefully choosing his words:

"The launch sent down with the Weather Bureau's hurricane warning ran aground and was hung up for several hours or I should have notified you

sooner, boys. The chances are a hundred to one that the storm will miss us. We are barely on the edge of the track of the West Indian storms, as shown by the records at head-quarters. We have a million dollars' worth of equipment afloat, and the chance of heavy weather has been kept in mind from the start of the work. My honest opinion is that you are as safe here as you would be ashore on the key, and I am sure you will be more comfortable. We have nothing but tents for the men, as you know, and if it comes on to blow hard they will be knocked flat. However, you may take your choice. All who wish to quit the quarter-boat can go back with me."

Two score of sheepish men sifted out of the crowd, rolled up their blankets, and gathered near the gangway. No one accused them of cowardice but it was plain to read that they felt they were losing caste among their fellows. Hogan called the Freshman aside and told him:

"If you are the least bit jumpy about this proposition, I don't want you to stay aboard to-night. It will not be laid up against you, Tommy, understand?"

The engineer happened to notice this conference and drew near enough to say:

"Hello, Winthrop. How are the broken fingers? By the way, the general manager mentioned something about sending me an order to transfer you, but the document has not arrived. Of course, I don't

want to make the other men uneasy, but I sort of feel responsible for you, and I should like to have you where I can keep an eye on you until the weather clears. Better come along and bunk with one of my foremen ashore."

"Do you mean that as a positive order, sir?" The Freshman stood at attention as if he were on parade, and Hogan smiled to himself as he silently noted this resolute demeanor. "If you don't mind, I prefer to stay with my men. We are not in the least worried. I ought to help take care of the company's property, and—well—we Quarter-boats hang together, sir."

Reluctant to press the matter lest he might seem alarmed, the engineer laughed and exclaimed:

"Very well, I dare not argue if you have that baseball team of yours behind you. I'll be down again before midnight, Hogan. There is not the slightest sign of wind and we have had these government warnings before with nothing doing. Be sure you have plenty of spare hawsers and chains. Storehouse Number Two will be open all night and you can get any stuff you want without a requisition."

The speaker caught up his lantern and set off to meet other anxious engineers who were making tours along the viaduct and among the floating equipment. The dread of a hurricane had haunted them through the months of toil afloat. Given time to finish the

work and they would have no fears, but meanwhile they must gamble with the sea and the weather for huge stakes in lives and property. Their grave responsibility was akin to that of so many generals continually menaced by a hostile force of overwhelming strength.

Apparently these anxieties were not shared by the hundred men who had remained on board of Quarter-Boat Number Ten. They felt secure enough, and continued fitfully to curse the windless heat, played cards and talked in little groups, or sprawled upon their cots. It was to be noted, however, that not a man was asleep, even when the hour wore on toward midnight. The sound of the distant surf became louder, rising to a long, booming note which betokened a heavy sea, a singular portent during a dead calm. At length there came a cold, gusty draught of wind out of the north-east. It lasted but a moment and the night was once more still and lifeless. The men at the tables picked up the cards that had been blown about like leaves, and, shivering, began to hunt for their coats.

Some of them went to the windows, others flocked upon the balconies and stared at the sky from which the stars had fled. Instead of the pallid film of mist there were heavy, ragged clouds moving rapidly, more and more of them until they filled the sky and the blackest darkness imaginable closed down like a

vast curtain so that nothing outside was distinguishable except the bravely twinkling lights of the craft moored near the viaduct. Again the chilling wind soughed out of the north, this time with greater power and duration, then another lull, followed by a violent downpour of rain.

Now the wind drove down in fiercer blasts, with briefer intervals between, and the timbers of the tall quarter-boat swayed and complained. A pile of crockery toppled from a cupboard shelf and was smashed upon the floor. Even the men of the "dynamite gang," whose nerves were almost invulnerable, jumped as if they had been shot at and revealed the fact that the strain of waiting was taxing their endurance. A little later and there were no more intermittent gusts. They had merged in the roaring onset of the hurricane itself. It did not instantly swoop down with all its power, but steadily blew harder, and its voice was a titanic *crescendo*. Men who had seen the instantaneous onslaught of cyclones in the Western country were ignorant of the habits of the tropical hurricane and scoffingly called it no more than a big gale of wind. But the brawny derrick-man who had been in Barbadoes shouted contemptuous comment:

"You fat-heads talk nonsense. This is the real thing. I know the symptoms. Another hour more and the wind will be fierce enough to blow the hair

off a dog. You yaps don't know what wind is. If we're really caught, I'd as soon be here as ashore. The sea will be makin' a holy mess of Long Key by daybreak, you hear me."

Already the breakers were stamping across the shoal water and battering the hull of the quarter-boat, which had never before rocked at her sheltered moorings. It was no more intended to be seaworthy than is a workingman's tenement. There was staunch, honest construction, however, to safeguard the hundred men; stout timbers, planks, and bracing above and below. The rising tide, heaped up by the might of the wind, soon surrounded this unwieldy hulk. Instead of resting at the edge of the beach, she was tossing in a waste of white water. Those of her company who had a mind to quit her thus early in the hurricane were unable to do so. They were cut off from the land by a wide barrier of surf which gleamed gray and ghostly in the spray-swept darkness.

"Many a poor man ashore has no roof over his head to-night," said Hogan. "Here we are all snug and tight, and no bosses to bother us. And old Number Ten is standin' up to it like a liner. The harder it blows the farther up on the key we'll be stranded to-morrow."

This was sound comfort, although the fury of the wind was increasing and the quarter-boat was in

danger of being torn to fragments or of whirling away piecemeal. There was no opportunity for seamanship. Either the structure would survive, or it would not. Leadership, command, found their duties in maintaining organization and discipline among the common herd, in keeping the human soul *en masse* ready and braced for whatever crisis might later befall.

Thomas Meserve did not realize that he was nearer death than he had ever been before. A little squad of men, all of them his elders, looked to him for orders and manifested by their words and bearing that he had authority over them. This was sufficient stimulus to make him forget himself, and he was alert to stay the first symptoms of panic, which, if unchecked, would surely make an inferno of Quarter-Boat Number Ten.

Thus far the boat had suffered no serious harm, although her superstructure was twisted and rent, and rain and spray flooded through openings where planks had been wrenched away and whirled to leeward like chips. The noise of the wind was bewildering, indescribable. Speech was impossible. Men shouted foolishly into each other's ears, trying vainly to convey trifling jests to prove that they were still stout-hearted and unafraid. Furniture was lurching, sliding to and fro, thumping against walls and partitions with splintering momentum. Now and

then a man fought his way to a shattered window, peered out for a moment and looked in vain for the lights along the viaduct, or strove to discover some signal from the key to show that the battling quarter-boat was not utterly forgotten.

At length—and the night had seemed interminable—the hurricane seemed to be passing. Its violence swiftly diminished, the quarter-boat righted herself and almost ceased to stagger under the assaults of the wind. The crew slid clumsily over the slippery floors, laughing boisterously, shaking hands, risking their necks in jigging it like so many dancing bears. A desolate dawn was lifting the curtain of night.

Soon there was light enough to reveal Long Key, which had frightfully shrunk in a few hours. The surf was dashing over embankments, wharves, tracks, and what not, sheer to the camp whose tents had been blown flat. Clusters of tattered, frayed cocoanut-palms flung their long streamers about like distress signals. The viaduct rose sheer and majestic above the sea, but masses of débris were washing against it and there were significant gaps in the flotilla that had fought for survival.

The quarter-boat gang, elated at having come through scathless, was for launching a skiff that had been hoisted into the mess-room and going to the relief of the demolished camp. The cooks plucked up courage to make fires in the ranges and prepare

breakfast, while the weary crew yelled lustily for coffee. The derrick-man who had been to Barbadoes did not join the jubilation. He said little, but he was watching the sea and sky, not in the north-east whence the hurricane had come, but in the north-west which was black and sinister.

"I am no croaker," said he to Hogan, "but we are not yet done with it. I mind me that it stopped just like this, and then, holy Moses, it whirled around and came from the opposite quarter and blew worse than ever. The reverse action of the blasted things is fierce. And if it does come out of the nor'west, man,—well, I shall wish I had gone ashore."

"You mean we will have no beach to be jammed up on?" said Hogan. "I never thought of that. The coast of Africa will be our destination. If it holds off a little, I may be able to get the men to the beach in the skiff, though it is a ticklish landing."

"You are too late," solemnly affirmed the derrick-man. "Did you feel that puff of wind on your cheek? That came out of the nor'west, Hogan. The hurricane has spun about like a top and will be down on us again in fewer minutes than you have teeth in your head. The engineers think we can ride to our lashings, but I doubt it."

Hogan stared absently at the cockle-shell of a skiff. It might hold a dozen men in a pinch and the

beach was no more than a hundred and fifty yards away. He called to Tom Meserve and said:

"I want you to go ashore, lad. The boat may swamp but ye can swim and make it. I'll send a few strong men with you to help you fetch it."

"What is the game, Jack? You look as grouchy as an owl."

"Never you mind. I want you away from here, Tommy."

Something in the manner of the sergeant made Thomas hesitate and balk. There was serious business afoot. Was he being shoved out of harm's way? Without attempting to be in the least heroic, simply as a matter of habit drilled into him, the Freshman said:

"There is something doing, Jack. You can't fool me. Are you going ashore? If not, then I stay on board Number Ten."

Hogan shoved him roughly toward the skiff in a flurry of impatience, for again the wind blew a warning puff from the north-west and shouted in his ear:

"The skiff for yours. Shall I knock you down and toss you in?"

"Not on your life. You're crazy," roared Thomas as he jerked himself free and ran forward. "The quarter-boat is good enough for me."

Hogan shrugged his heavy shoulders, deep sadness clouded his face for an instant, and then he

smiled; for the emotion uppermost was pride, and proud indeed he was of the decision of this bunkie of his. Lifting his voice in a resonant war-cry, Hogan shouted:

"Quarter-boats, ahoy! The skiff is free to them that can grab her first. Quitters to the front. There will be more wind presently."

He had no sooner spoken than the hurricane began to blow out of the north-west. A score of men leaped for the skiff, fought madly to grasp her gunwales, and the weaker were kicked aside and trampled. They were still fighting when the little boat was cast loose, and as it spun away to leeward in a fog of spume and spindrift the sanest passengers were plying the oars frantically. Whether or not they reached the key, the watchers on the quarter-boat could not discern. Their own peril was suddenly renewed and they had been given no opportunity to flee to the solid land. Number Ten no longer pounded upon the hard bottom, nor careened higher up on the key. She was tugging at her hawsers and anchors, thrust seaward by the enormous propulsive power of the storm. Neither small boat nor swimmer could have lived when the hurricane once more gained its might.

A little later and one of the hawsers snapped with the report of a cannon. One end of the quarter-boat lurched farther away from the shore. Should she once break free, the only hope for those on board

was that she might fetch up on one of the outer reefs before the superstructure should be torn to bits. Missing this refuge, Number Ten must drive across the wide Hawk Channel and smash against the Florida Reef or founder in the Atlantic itself. The peril was so imminent and ghastly, so unexpected after the brief respite, that the hundred men thus entrapped had need of uncommon fortitude to appear unshaken. A few had already begun to weep and slink into corners where they prayed aloud, raising tremulous hands aloft, but for the most part these hard and reckless toilers were standing up under the strain.

Hogan kept them busy patching holes in the walls, shoring up the braces, and taking turns at the pump to keep the water down in the racked and leaky hold. A force of the strongest men who were struggling to nail a tarpaulin against the windward wall suddenly raised a long, pealing cheer that carried across the deck. Their comrades rushed to join them, greatly puzzled that men should cheer in such a time as this. Then there came the sound of a deep-throated steam-whistle close at hand. The crew of Number Ten beheld a concrete mixing barge whirling out to sea, rolling hull under, her deck-house looming in a smother of mist and spray. Tom Meserve felt a limp hand touch his own and turned to see old man Jones, who cried shrilly:

"There goes Fitzherbert. He has broken adrift. I know his barge by her paint. This is his finish, God help his soul."

The steam whistle of the barge trumpeted one long, defiant blast after another, a salute, a farewell. Its sonorous message seemed to be inspired and eloquent, as if telling all who might hear that the vanishing craft was going to her doom in command of a British gentleman who knew how to die, even though he had made a failure of living. More than this, the electric lights of the barge's plant still twinkled brightly from every window. So with his whistle shouting, not a wild, disorderly appeal for help, but a brave and cheerful good-by, Fitzherbert went sweeping out to sea and the inevitable end. Jones was wiping his eyes as he sobbed:

"Did you ever know a finer finish than that? Stoking his fires, and tooting his whistle, and tending his dynamo, and sailing off to glory like a thoroughbred? Drunk or sober, he never showed a yellow streak. And I have lost a good friend."

"Perhaps he was trying to put heart into us," quavered Thomas, who was profoundly moved and thrilled. "Well, Mr. Jones, we'll try to think of him—if—if—we go adrift. Have you a family?"

"Only my wife," and the book-keeper's thin shoulders were shaking as he turned away and crept back to his corner, where he sat biting his lips but

made no other sign to show that he knew how near he was to the shadow of death. Thomas was fighting down a choking fear, the fear hitherto unknown to him, that he, who loved his life so much, was actually in dreadful peril of losing it. In his waking dreams he had beheld himself yielding up his life in some splendidly heroic situation for a shining cause, but the menacing reality spelled oblivion, a thought almost unthinkable. What mattered it if he died a hero or a coward? No one would ever know. In this crucial moment of torturing introspection he might have gone wholly to pieces, but one of his own gang came up to him and, the bonds of discipline unbroken even now, respectfully asked for further orders. The youthful foreman came to himself, felt his strength return in every fibre, and led the way below to try to caulk the gaping seams with torn strips of blanket. While he was groping with a lantern in water to his knees, Hogan found him and reported, as one courageous man to another of the same breed:

"The pilings are pulling out, Tommy. Two more hawsers snapped while we were cheerin' Fitzherbert, the saints love him. The anchors will be no more good than tooth-picks when we begin to drift. We're almost off on the voyage, lad. Will you forgive me for fetchin' you into the thick of it? Not that I am at all disheartened, mind ye, but there

will be little chance for a quiet chat after we head for the open sea in Number Ten."

The Freshman gripped the hand of his friend and sung out, to make himself heard:

"I am not going back on the returns, Jack. And we are not through yet. I'll try to keep my nerve, anyhow."

They had no more than regained the lower deck when the quarter-boat broke away clear and free, and wallowed seaward before the storm. Along the ridge of the rapidly receding Long Key many men were running to and fro, now blown flat by the wind, again clawing their way from tree to tree, or wildly waving their arms. Tim McFarland pushed close to the Freshman and bawled:

"The boys yonder have turned out to see us off. I am terrible sorry we haven't Terry Flynn with us. He has cheated the devil this time, sure."

Thomas looked into the face of the grizzled ball-player. McFarland had no reason to flinch from the scrutiny. His bronzed cheek had not paled, his shrewd, kindly eyes were bright and undaunted, and there was the unforgettable, jaunty alertness of the athlete in the poise of his well-knit figure. Whatever fate awaited him, he was likely to meet it true to form, thought Thomas, even with a touch of swagger.

The superstructure of this huge and clumsy house-

boat soon began to disintegrate. It was almost miraculous that it should have held together so long. Exposed to the unbroken force of the wind, hammered by the tall and breaking seas, the framework was fairly stripped of roof and planking. The men had forsaken the second story and were crowded into the mess-room below, silently hoping and praying that the boat might strike an outlying key. This was the fighting chance, the only one.

With tragic intensity they stared to leeward until, at length, a gray blotch barely lifted above the leaden horizon, slid swiftly past, and vanished in the sad and sombre obscurity of the unbroken sea. The fighting chance, the only one, was gone.

Hogan took counsel with himself and reflected:

"Number Ten holds together most amazing. They tell me there are deep-water passages through the Florida Reef. Maybe the old packet'll smell her way through one of them and not make kindlin' wood of herself after all. But it is too silly a bet to be worth mentioning."

He summoned Thomas, Tim McFarland, and half a dozen other trusted lieutenants and conveyed to them, partly by gestures, that if the quarter-boat struck they were to crowd outside to escape being killed by falling timbers, and to take overboard with them anything they could lay hands on that would help them to stay afloat. By now Number Ten was

reeling across the Hawk Channel, water-logged, the combing seas breaking through every opening. Perhaps a dozen men, weakened by despair, no longer clinging to life like their braver fellows, were wrenched from their nerveless grasp of timbers and stays and swept overboard to perish. Already those fittest to survive were made manifest by their grim refusal to cease fighting for life.

A little while and those who were watching saw the surf leaping high ahead of the quarter-boat, and heard its awful clamor. There was no open water there. Number Ten was about to crash against the submerged and deadly barrier of the Florida Reef. Even now most of these men were quiet, some dazed with terror, it is true, but many of them preferring to die like men, and prepared to struggle until the last gasp.

There came one tremendous shock of demolition. The quarter-boat, or what was left of it, hung fast, was picked up and hurled skyward, and came down upon the jagged coral beneath her. It was like smiting an eggshell with a sledge-hammer. Almost instantly the sea was littered with fragments of hull and upper-works, and with men dead and alive. The breakers bore this débris off to leeward of the Reef, into the deeper water which was less violently agitated.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER THE HURRICANE

ALTHOUGH it had been unnoticed during the last moments of Quarter-Boat Number Ten, the hurricane was abating and patches of blue sky had begun to break through the hurrying clouds. It was past all expectation that any of the company should be left alive; but an hour passed, and then another, and the Gulf Stream bore upon its heaving surface a number of widely scattered black dots which a sea-gull with a mathematical turn of mind might have counted up to twenty or thirty. The seas were subsiding rapidly and the survivors who had miraculously managed to keep afloat until they were clear of the prodigious breakers of the Reef, found themselves able to struggle and breathe and manfully renewed the tenacious battle for existence.

One of the bobbing heads which might have been discerned by the curious sea-gull aforesaid, belonged to Sergeant John Hogan, who was holding fast to the rope handle of a bulky wooden chest with one fist while he waved the other in frantic signal to a casta-

way who was also drifting northward, in company with a buoyant mess-room table. Hogan had recognized the blond head thus visible as belonging to Thomas Meserve but for lack of engine power it was impossible to navigate in the desired direction. A favoring slant of current, however, aided by much kicking and splashing, at length carried the twain within hailing distance of each other, whereupon Hogan decided to abandon the wooden chest and swim for the table. Shaking the water from his eyes and snorting like a low-pressure exhaust, he bobbed alongside the Freshman and sputtered:

"Hello, boy. Are you hurted anywheres? I kept close to you as long as I could when she was breaking up, but I was disorganized for once. It's God's own mercy that I have found ye alive an' kickin'."

"I agree with you there, Jack. Hurt? No, I am as sound as a dollar, barring a few bruises, though I can't understand how all those flying timbers missed me. I don't know what happened after she struck. I was whirled about in the breakers like a chip and by luck managed to grab this table when I was about to give up and quit. What is the chance of being picked up? I haven't lost my nerve, but isn't this a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire?"

"Sure, we'll be picked up. We are in the track of slathers of steamers. The water is warm and we

can hang on for a good many hours longer at a pinch. As for the sharks, forget 'em."

"Have you seen anybody else to recognize him?"

"Tim McFarland went by me a while ago, Tommy. He was hitched to an empty oil barrel and ridin' high and makin' more speed than me. We passed the time o' day and he seemed to be feelin' fairly cheerful. He said his passage was booked through to New York and he was sorry he couldn't stop and have dinner with me. 'Twould take worse than this to rattle Tim. Have ye spied old man Jones anywhere?"

"No, Jack, I am afraid he went under right away. He had no more strength than a rabbit."

"But the little man had the heart of a lion," said Hogan. "I sized him up last night. And strange as it may sound to ye, 'tis those with strong hearts that you will find sloshin' around out here in the briny to-day. Never again will you be called sandless, Tommy. I was proud of ye. You have stood the test and you didn't squeal, but oh, a lot of other good men have gone."

The sun had begun to blaze down upon their bare heads and soon they were intolerably thirsty and found talking painful. The other survivors had drifted from sight and they were alone. Staying afloat was not difficult. The water did not chill them and little strength was required to keep hold

of the tiny craft, yet should night fall without rescue they could hardly hope to cling to life until the following day. Hogan made no effort to reveal what was passing in his own mind, but the Freshman murmured little broken confidences now and then, more than once mentioning his anxiety for the safety of the girl who dwelt on Little Spanish Key. Hogan smiled understandingly, with no more rough words of banter or reproof. In his heart he felt certain the hurricane must have swept and submerged the islet of Little Spanish Key, which lay peculiarly exposed, but he said nothing of his fears and bade his comrade take courage. The afternoon was waning when the sergeant said:

"If we get too weak to hold on, Tommy, the table will float with one man spraddled out on top of it. I want you to climb aboard, understand?"

"And leave you to go under, Jack? I will be hanged if I will. We have been bunkies too long to play favorites in this game."

"You are as obstinate as ever you were," exclaimed Hogan, and his accents were singularly affectionate. "I will say no more."

When the time should come, the sergeant intended simply to let go and make no more fuss about it, leaving the table to keep his comrade afloat. It was his plain duty to give Thomas the better chance because he had led the youngster into this dire situation.

The ethical code of John Hogan had no complexities whatever. The sunset was not far off when he said with a genuine laugh:

"Remember calling your college scrape a 'tragical predicament,' Tommy? I never heard words sound as foolish as those did. You ought to have saved 'em to fit this case."

"This is certainly the real thing, Jack. Oh, how dry I am. And hungry? Well, rather. I wish it wasn't going to get dark so soon, don't you? My arms are so cramped that I'm afraid I can't hang on——"

"Glory be, you will not have to," shouted Hogan, tugging frantically at the edge of the table to hoist himself an inch or two higher as he gazed at the horizon to the northward. A black smudge of smoke was plainly visible, and as the yearning gaze of Thomas found it, he cried out between his sobs:

"A steamer! Will she see us? Oh, Jack, I guess I am losing my nerve. What if she passes us way off yonder! It will mean my finish. It is our only chance."

"You dig your fingers into the planks of this table and keep cool," bellowed Hogan. "God isn't cruel enough to throw us into the discard after He has fetched us through this far. Pray, Tommy, and *wish hard*. There's more than one kind o' wireless

messages. That steamer has *got* to know we're here and needin' her awful bad."

The steamer slowly rose out of the violet sea, first her threadlike spars, then the white cabins, then the black wedge of her hull. Would the officers on her bridge catch a glimpse of the minute speck or pass it unwitting that two men were clinging thereto in the last extremity? The castaways could send no signals, they could only wait.

The steamer veered sharply from her course. They had been sighted. Soon she slackened speed, the sound of her whistle came faintly down the wind, and handkerchiefs were fluttering from her promenade deck. A boat swung smartly out from its davits and sailors were swarming down the falls like monkeys. Oars dipped and gleamed and the yawl slid over the long swells with a feather of foam at her cut-water.

"Grab the lad first," gasped Hogan between swollen lips as the boat sheered alongside them.

"No, I can wait," murmured the Freshman.

"Is this a conversation party or a rescue at sea? And are we to lay to while you play Alphonse and Gaston?" hotly demanded the officer in the stern-sheets. "Yank 'em inboard, men, sharp, now."

The courteous derelicts were yanked over the gunwales, like so much water-soaked luggage, and dumped on the bottom-boards, where they lay drip-

ping in utter exhaustion. Convincing himself that they were in no danger of passing away, the mate urged his men toward their vessel and observed with a matter-of-fact air:

"More of that quarter-boat's crew, I suppose. We've picked up nearly a dozen since noon. They are impeding navigation, blamed if they aren't. Mighty glad to do you a service, though."

"Do you know the names of any of them?" feebly inquired Thomas, whose head was pillowed against a seaman's knees.

"The purser can give you that. You are a lot of miracles, you are. We caught the tail end of that hurricane and nobody understands how a man of you pulled through."

The Freshman closed his eyes and was content to be alive. He was half asleep when the seaman hoisted him up the steamer's tall side, and as they carried him to the state-room he awoke only long enough to demand, in a plaintive whisper, "a long, cold drink of something wet." White-jacketed stewards stripped off his soggy clothing and tucked him between the sheets while the captain of the Palmetto liner came in on tiptoe to see how he fared. Thomas opened one eye, smiled as bravely as he could, and slipped away into such blissful, luxurious drowsiness that the visitor forbore to disturb him with questions.

The captain was about to withdraw when a spare, elderly gentleman appeared in the narrow passageway, halted at the state-room door, and waited for permission to enter. His manner was extremely nervous and his rather harsh and domineering features were twitching in the oddest way, as if they were quite unused to betraying emotions of any kind. He peered over the captain's broad shoulder, fidgeted, and cried:

"I dropped and smashed my glasses just as those poor fellows were being brought on board. I could not see, but—I—I fancied—upon my word, sir, I will confess to you that I am afraid to look— Is the younger man in this room? Is he likely to recover? Let—let me pass, if you please. I shall not disturb him."

The familiar accents aroused the drowsy Freshman. He winked rapidly, gazed at the captain, then at the agitated gentleman beside the bunk, and cheerily murmured:

"How are you, father? Where did you blow from? Or have I gone off my head?"

"God bless you, Thomas, I was bound to Key West to find you," gasped Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr., bending over to kiss the boy's cheek and fumbling for a handkerchief with uncertain fingers. "I cannot believe this is really you. I must send a wireless to your mother at once. No, you

must not try to talk, my son. Go to sleep and I will come back later. Or do you mind if I sit beside your berth, if I promise to be perfectly quiet?"

The fugitive could scarcely believe that this humble suppliant could be the same father from whose wrath he had fled in panic terror. It was as if a barrier between them had been broken down. Tears were in the boy's eyes as he feebly returned:

"I don't want you to leave me. I'll come to pretty soon. Sorry I can't seem to stay awake. What are you going to wire mother?"

"That I shall bring you home at once and nurse you back to health, my son."

"Give her my love, but please go slow with the rest of that," replied the independent heir. "I haven't lost my job on Long Key yet and it is my duty to go back and report to the engineer. Excuse me for yawning. I can't say much more now. But as for nursing me back to health, that sounds honestly funny, father. You don't know your own son. I am fagged now, but plenty of sleep and a few square meals are all I need. You couldn't kill me with an axe."

Thereupon Thomas clasped his father's hand, smiled contentedly, and was snoring no more than forty seconds later. The elder Meserve sat and looked at him with emotions curiously jumbled, as he said to himself:

"What an amazing, providential meeting, and what an escape! When we picked up those other shipwrecked men and learned that the hurricane had swept the keys, I was most miserably anxious, and now——"

He leaned forward and patted the hard, brown hand of his only son, forgetting that he had been a disappointment, a source of endless worry, a just object of wrath. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Senior, was in every respect a starched, conservative citizen and a solid pillar of society. He no more paraded his wealth than he did his church membership, for instance. Even the younger Thomas had the vaguest notions of the coupon-cutting activities of his sire and took it for granted that horse-shoe nails, for the most part, upheld the family fortune. The hot-headed son might have had his choice of a variety of occupations when he flew off from the campus at so wild a tangent, even to helping build a railroad on the Pacific Coast.

At first his father had assumed that the fugitive would soon return, penniless and penitent. Later when the bulletins of Sergeant Hogan burst upon the household, stubborn anger took hold of the parent and he called the boy a disgraceful puppy and was for leaving him to go his own gait. The natural pangs of a father bereft of his one child had softened this indignant mood, and yielding to the tearful pro-

testations of the mother of Thomas, he had written a letter to the general manager of the Florida Railway and Navigation Company, as already mentioned. He was not sufficiently thawed to journey in pursuit of the boy, and had adopted this compromise measure to save some remnants of his pride. When no reply was received, however, and no more letters came from Thomas himself, the father capitulated, went to New York, and boarded a Palmetto liner for Key West, intending to ransack the Florida Keys.

In the first flush of his rejoicing at the deliverance of Thomas from a watery grave, he thought only of taking him home as soon as he should be able to travel. The boy's flat refusal to forsake his "job" was disconcerting and both tact and patience might be required. Thus absorbed in his reflections, Mr. Meserve had to confess to himself that his son had a manly, resolute aspect such as he had not worn in college, and seemed capable of taking care of himself without parental intervention.

Thomas was so busily engaged in slumber that at length his father went out of the state-room very softly, and asked a steward to bring him tidings of the other castaway who had been picked up at the same time. The word came back that the doughty derelict, Hogan by name, was sitting up in his bunk and roaring lustily for food and news of his "bunkie."

"It is Sergeant Hogan, of course," said Mr. Meserve. "So he was standing by my boy to the finish, just as he promised to do in that remarkable letter he sent me from New York. I hope he feels able to talk with me. There are so many things that I am anxious to learn from him."

Thereupon he followed the steward and appeared slightly timorous at sight of the large and rugged soldier who exclaimed cordially:

"Come in, sir, and make yourself at home. I have heard that you were aboard. I am proud to shake the hand of a man with a son like Thomas, Junior."

"You should lie down and keep quiet, Sergeant," cautioned the other. "By rights, you ought to be in a state of collapse."

"And for what? I am shy some sleep, but I've been restin' all day on th' bosom of the Gulf Stream. It's not easy killin' us Quarter-boats. Look at your delicate slip of a lad, Tommy, and think what he has been through."

"He looks the picture of health and vigor," agreed Mr. Meserve. "And to think he has survived when so many others are gone from your crew!"

"We'll not mention 'em, if you please," sadly murmured Hogan. "You and I have had a bit of one-sided correspondence, sir, though me tongue is

readier than my pen, and me fist than either. I hope ye will not scold me too hard, not till I get my strength back."

"My son seems to think a great deal of you," said Mr. Meserve, deliberately parting his coat-tails and seating himself upon a canvas stool. "I am too thankful and glad to scold, Sergeant, but you are a straightforward man and I am the same kind. Frankly, I have considered you guilty of a grave error of judgment in leading Thomas away from home. You took a great deal on yourself. Because he is still a minor, I might say that you kidnapped him. But there is something to be said on the other side. I failed to make a manly fellow of him. You appear to have succeeded. Therefore by-gones are by-gones."

The speech was slightly patronizing and the manner of its delivery even more so. Hogan's keen eyes were a shade less cordial and he was no longer smiling as he said, with a careless movement of a cracked and blistered hand:

"I will not wrangle with you. You know what the boy was when you last saw him at home. Wait till he is on his feet. Then look him over. Try him out. He is a man. It was little of my doing, but I gave him the chance and I steered him straight. I expect no thanks, but do not misjudge me, if you please."

Mr. Meserve coughed, gazed at the port-hole, and veered off on another tack. His demeanor was less ruffling as he said:

"Sergeant Hogan, we must have no hard words. I hope great things for my boy. He will some day succeed to the control of large interests. There is one matter that disturbs me greatly. I should not mention it now but his mother will expect a telegram regarding it. In all probability Thomas will marry in due time. Much depends upon his marriage. You and I meet on a common ground when we discuss his welfare. Who is the girl he mentioned in his letter to me? Is he in love with her? His mother has been fretting herself almost to a shadow for fear he has entangled himself in some wild, foolish, impossible affair. He had kept clear of sentimental escapades, even in college. Tell me what you know about it."

Hogan knitted his black brows. Weakened as he was by his battle with the sea, he wished that this interview might have been deferred, but the father's anxiety made him inconsiderate. The sergeant was reluctant to play the traitor to his young comrade, but he could not be true to himself unless he told what he knew concerning the cloud of suspicion that enveloped the household of Little Spanish Key.

"'Tis for us to speak well of the dead," he slowly replied. "I am terribly afraid that the hurricane

may have disposed of the problem ye mention. I pray the saints 'tis not true, for she is a flower of a girl, and I could never blame the boy if he loved her dearly. She is a lady, understand. You need have no fear about that part of it. But her old man is hidin' from every one, and whether he robbed a bank, as I mistrust, or whatever divilment he was mixed up in, there is a black mark against him, and he is an outlaw."

Mr. Meserve was greatly disconcerted and hastily inquired:

"And what is your evidence, may I ask? What do you know about the man?"

Hogan related in brief and vivid phrase the circumstances of the adventure of Thomas on Little Spanish Key and the singular episode of the baseball game when he had overheard the daughter pleading that her father be let alone. Mr. Meserve listened in gloomy silence, nursing his thin jaw, and had only to say when the tale was done:

"As a guardian, Sergeant, you seem to have been caught napping. However, I shall soon take the boy far away from such people as these whom you describe so unfavorably."

"Don't include the girl in that, sir," retorted Hogan with a good deal of spirit. "Mind you, I have nothing to say against her, and you mustn't be too hard on the boy. Bless your heart, he is

just at the age when the heart jumps at the sight of a pair o' bright eyes, an' one smile can make the world go round and round like a wind-mill. He may fall in love, as the sayin' is, a dozen times and fall out again as quick, before he finds the real one. I am still a young man meself, though I've been that grandfatherly with Thomas that I began to look for gray hairs an' was grown quite venerable. Can't ye remember what a fool you were for the petticoats at twenty, sir? 'Tis harmless, like th' measles, only more catchin'. Go easy with him. Ye can coax th' lad but he won't be driven. He's afraid of th' weight of me fist an' I have him tamed, but I doubt if you could handle him in the same way."

Sedate and matter-of-fact as he was, Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr., failed to resent the audacious charge that he had once been young, and his smile was no longer wintry as he said:

"You are a persuasive man, Sergeant, and I shall look to you for advice. As you say, the hurricane may have solved this awkward problem, but I hope with all my heart that no such tragedy has happened."

CHAPTER XIV

THE RESCUE OF HELEN

At noon next day the Freshman awoke in a room of the Key West Hotel, wriggled luxuriantly at finding himself in a full-sized bed, and vehemently demanded much breakfast. His father hastened from an adjoining room and exclaimed with animation almost boyish:

"Good-morning, Thomas. You sound like a hungry young giant, and you look astonishingly well. Are you really going to try to get up to-day?"

"Why not? I have important business, father. I was so tired and sleepy last night, that I can't even remember leaving the steamer. I suppose I navigated to the hotel in a hack. If I had known where I was, you would have heard from me sooner. I must not lose a moment of precious time. Right after breakfast you and I will get busy. What is the news from the keys?"

"The construction camps were pretty well flooded and blown down, and the floating equipment was terribly shattered, so I hear. But most of the loss of life was in your quarter-boat."

"How about the viaduct and trestles and the permanent way?"

"No serious damage, and work will be resumed as soon as the force can be organized, camps rebuilt, and material collected."

"Oh, isn't that splendid!" cried the young foreman. "Any more castaways brought into port?"

"A tramp steamer came into Key West this morning with four of the crew of Quarter-boat Number Ten. Two of these men have been asking for you at the hotel. One is named Jones, a little gray-haired wisp of a man. He was floating in an empty water-tank, as snug as you please, a most extraordinary escape. The other is McFarland, a stocky, self-possessed person, quite entertaining in his way. Are they friends of yours?"

"I should say they are! Isn't that great?" Thomas scrambled out of bed and made for the outfit of new clothing thoughtfully provided by his father from the shops of Key West. "Wait till I fall on their necks and whoop for joy! I *knew* they would turn up. Hooray! this is better news than a million dollars."

Suddenly this elation vanished. The most vital question had been withheld until now. He had not dared to ask it, but it leaped to his lips at the prompting of his heart:

"What about the other people, those who live on

the keys? Have any relief boats been sent out to find them?"

"Key West harbor is a mass of wreckage, Thomas. Almost everything afloat was smashed or stranded. Two small steamers started up to search the inhabited keys a little while ago. Why—why do you ask?"

"Because I must know what happened to Little Spanish Key. *The* girl lives there, father, Helen Eastabrook, the girl I wrote you about; the finest, dearest girl in the world. You must charter or buy a steamer of some kind this minute. We are going to find her."

Almost afraid of this impetuous, masterful young man, the father tried to delay the conflict of interests, and soothingly replied:

"The relief steamers will visit all the keys before we can possibly reach them."

"No, they will not," shouted Thomas. "Hardly anybody in Key West knows that there is a house on Little Spanish Key. It was built only a few months ago, on the side away from the channel. Boats almost never pass it. You want me to go home to Cleveland with you. If you refuse to help me now, I swear I will never go home again. I can make a living down here."

This was not the happy-go-lucky, "footless" Freshman of other days who now stormed at his

father as if it were absurd to be afraid of him. The older and the younger generation had squarely clashed, and neither was to be bullied from his course. The boyish foreman, late of Quarter-boat Number Ten, had learned that life held more serious troubles than lack of money or place, and as for being threatened, there was no more retreating under fire in his code of tactics. Not that he had a mind to be impertinent or disrespectful, but his rights and duties were his own, to be jealously guarded and steadfastly fought for. And his father, shrewdly versed in reading men, perceived that he no longer dealt with a boy. Even while he was prepared to fight this issue to a finish, for the first time in his life he was genuinely proud of his son.

"Sit down, Thomas," said he with a dry smile. "If you put the case to me on the grounds of humanity, and these Eastabrook people need a rescue party, I will find some kind of a steamer. What you ask shall be done. Now, is it too much to inquire whether you think you are in love with this girl?"

Thomas folded his arms, stared at the floor, was ill at ease, and honestly confessed:

"I am not quite sure, but I think I shall be if I can see her about once more. This is no fluffy flirtation. Great heavens! how do I know I have any chance with her? She thinks I am a hobo, and

her father would try to shoot me on sight. He nearly potted me once."

"What if he is a criminal? Doesn't that matter to you?"

"Not the least little bit. She and I agreed that choosing fathers was no easy proposition."

Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr., had a latent sense of humor, and at this wicked assault he threw back his head and chuckled until overtaken by a fit of coughing.

"Let us declare a truce, Thomas," he cried. "I am forced to believe you when you state that you will not go home unless you wish to. I am going out to find a steamer."

"Which means that you will certainly annex one," was the son's confident assertion. "I'll be ready when you say the word."

Left to himself the Freshman became restless and depressed. Why had he wasted precious minutes? He was too distraught to realize that his father could achieve results where he would have merely run to and fro in futile endeavor. No more than twenty minutes had passed when Hogan came in, looking very hale and fit, and announced:

"The old gentleman nailed a vessel as soon as he cleared for action. He is some sudden when it comes to business. The agent of the steamer was sitting on the hotel piazza, and by the sad look in your

father's face, I think he had to buy her. Come along. He sent me up for you."

Thomas bolted the last of his breakfast and ran into the hall, but his gait was weak and unsteady, and he had to slow down. A hack was waiting at the outer door and he climbed in, followed by his father and Hogan. Presently they were climbing aboard a small fruit steamer which had put into port ahead of the hurricane, and a local pilot came dashing down the wharf.

"You can't get anywhere near Spanish Key with your draft of water," he called to the captain on the bridge.

"Then find a launch we can take aboard or tow," crisply observed Mr. Meserve. "What about this one hauled out on the wharf? Where is her owner?"

"Up in Tony Capello's saloon at the head of the next dock," said the pilot.

"Go and fetch him. Captain, have some of your men put that launch on board of your steamer," commanded Mr. Meserve. "I will make terms later. We have no time to throw away."

"Jingo! but you do know how to get action, father," exclaimed the admiring Thomas. "I always had an idea that you were slower than molasses in your business methods."

"Perhaps we have underrated each other, my son," was the quiet reply.

The rusty little tramp steamer moved out into the stream as soon as the amazed owner of the launch had been hauled up the side by main strength, and ploughed toward the Hawk Channel, past the melancholy litter of wreckage which strewed the beaches of the harbor. The passengers sat grouped on deck, talking little, since all were fagged in mind and body. Their mission was not discussed. It was merciful to have no more warring argument. The captain of the steamer came aft, at length, and asked for orders. The pilot dared run no farther toward the inside channel, and they were almost abreast of the opening which led by devious, shallow passages to Little Spanish Key. Mr. Meserve was about to tell him to put the launch overboard, when the men on the bridge raised a shout and were seen to gesticulate in the direction of the port bow.

The passengers hurried forward and climbed to the lofty bridge. Against the dark-green background of a distant key gleamed a large, ragged patch of white. Above it fluttered some kind of a signalling flag or streamer. The captain snatched the glasses from a shelf in the wheel-house window, and gazed no more than a moment before he cried:

"A steamer ashore there, and most of her upperworks gone by the board. It looks like some kind of a river craft. Take us as near as you can, pilot. There are people on her."

He ordered the vessel's boats to be cleared away, and the mates mustered their crews while the fruiter crept cautiously toward the stranded wreck.

"A stern-wheeler, what is left of her," presently exclaimed the captain.

"Is it one of the railroad company's navy, pilot?"

"It looks like the *Memphis Queen*, Captain Canova, sir," said the pilot. "She hasn't been heard of since before the blow. Yes, I'm sure of it, although her funnels are gone and she's stripped down to the main-deck cabins."

"The *Memphis Queen!*" gasped Tom Meserve. "I forgot all about her. Captain Canova has been an awfully good friend of mine, father. He has been interested in my—my acquaintance with her, too. But you must not lay that up against him. Oh, I hope he has weathered it all right."

They had drawn near enough to see at least two score human beings clustered on the main deck, or emerging from the broken cabins. The fruiter stopped, an anchor was let go, and the launch and three of the boats were lowered. Thomas and his party clambered into the launch, which soon distanced the other craft. As the water shoaled, progress became more careful, but soon the rescuers were able to distinguish the gallant figure of Captain Canova, theatrical even in disaster, conspicuously posted in majestic solitude on top of one of the cabins.

To the greeting of cheers from the launch he responded with a florid bow, his hand on his heart, and bombarded his forlorn company with voluble commands.

The Freshman fell to scanning the people who were pressing along the guard-rail of the *Memphis Queen*. Was he dreaming, or was that portly, bulky figure in the foreground familiar in his memory? Assuredly it was the ungracious recluse of Little Spanish Key, who had been called Mr. Stephen Eastabrook. Thomas looked wildly to left and right of this forbidding and massive parent. Had his daughter been saved with him on board of the *Memphis Queen?* No, she was not there. The boy groaned and bit his lip. His father asked him a question, but it was unheard. Hogan softly explained:

"From his description, the stout party yonder is the outlaw himself, sir. But the girl is not with him."

Captain Canova was seen to descend to the deck. There followed a stir among his people as they moved to one side and the other, leaving a lane between. Presently the dashing skipper reappeared. A woman leaned heavily on his arm as he escorted her slowly to the rail, where she stood waiting for the launch. She was slim and youthful, and there was an appealing loveliness in her appearance although she was pale and languid. Thomas clasped his

hands and murmured an "Ah-h-h!" that was eloquent beyond all words. The hard-headed, critical Hogan, who had never liked Canova, was moved to mutter:

"Just like him to play to the gallery. The poor child was sitting down behind the crowd, too tired and used up to stay on her feet. And he led her down to the front of the stage for a tableau. Pity he couldn't have footlights and a brass band. Well, Thomas, there she is."

Aye, there she was, and her face lighted with gladness unconstrained as she recognized the youth who had moved into the bow of the launch. In the jubilant confusion of the rescue, no one chanced to observe that Mr. Stephen Eastabrook had retreated to the rear of the crowd as if wishing to efface himself, so far as his bulk would permit. This coy manœuvre separated him from his daughter, who remained in Captain Canova's care until she was lowered into the launch, which was speedily filled with others of the weary, shivering company. Without waiting for the boats, the launch was headed at full speed for the fruiter.

Helen Eastabrook was not the kind of heroine to faint in this dramatic moment. Hers had been a frightful experience to endure, but her high-spirited courage and vitality were proof against collapse, and while Thomas made her as comfortable as possible

with coats and cushions, she smiled her thanks and told him:

"Captain Canova did not forget us. He ran his steamer as near to our key as he dared, just when the wind began to blow hard, and took us off in one of his boats, Levi and all. I think he might have saved his steamer if he had not delayed to find and rescue us. The hurricane was very terrible, but since then we have had no great suffering on board. There was food and water, and I slept a good deal of last night in one of the lower cabins that was not washed away. I was the only woman on board. Captain Canova picked up about twenty men who had gone adrift from the keys. They all tried to take care of me—fireman, deckhands, and the railroad laborers. I shall never again call them hoboes."

Mr. Meserve, Sr., more than ever regretted the mishap to his eye-glasses. He was very near-sighted, and therefore he hovered close to Helen and, notwithstanding the fact that his vision was handicapped, the inspection made him say to himself:

"There are extenuating circumstances in the case of Thomas. At his age—hum-m—I might have—well, the fates seem to be playing into the young man's hands."

Once on board the fruiter, the captain insisted that Miss Helen enjoy the hospitality of his state-room. It was Thomas, Junior, who escorted her to

the doorway, and they lingered there for some time, his father retreating aft like a self-sacrificing gentleman. Whatever these young persons had to say to each other was cut short by the captain, who ducked out of the chart-room to remark:

"My wife came down with me last voyage, miss. She is visiting some friends in Cuba, but she left a trunk full of her dunnage aboard. You'll find it behind the starboard curtain. The old lady won't mind. Help yourself."

Thomas instantly departed and rejoined his parent. There followed a long and earnest conference, during which the boats returned from the *Memphis Queen*, and Mr. Stephen Eastabrook was able to vanish into the second mate's cabin almost unobserved. Soon Hogan appeared and announced with surprisingly humble mien:

"I was all wrong about that brass-buttoned, chesty Canova man. I have told him so. He is good enough to play ball with the Quarter-boats, and I can say no more for him. His men tell me that he kept 'em jollied up all night long when the hurricane was the fiercest, and was as chipper as a cock-sparrow every minute. And the way he rammed that crazy old packet over the shoals in the dark and picked up your friends of Little Spanish Key was a stunt to make ye love him. He surely took good care of the girl, Tommy. They all say that. You'd better be

careful! He is a fascinating sea-dog, is Captain Rafael Canova, and when it comes to a grand-stand play, he holds the centre of the stage."

Thomas felt the acute pangs of jealousy and looked so unhappy that Hogan hastened to make a diversion.

"Did ye note that her outlaw father took to cover, as usual?"

Mr. Meserve interrupted:

"I am sorry that I was unable to see him at close range, Sergeant. Of course he can no longer remain in concealment. I shall make my own investigation in Key West. The situation is most perplexing. I am reluctant to involve his very charming daughter in open disgrace, but my own vital interests——"

"*My* interests, if you please," violently exclaimed Thomas. Sparks were about to fly when just then Captain Canova strolled aft, almost as sprucely turned out as usual, having repaired the ravages of the storm in some mysterious fashion of his own. Twirling his black mustache with an airy grace, he said in greeting:

"May I have the pleasure of meeting your father, young man? Ha, ha, things have been happening since the great base-ball game. That Cuban umpire was a cousin of mine. He did not sleep well for a week. No more excursions on the *Memphis Queen*, or letters tossed aboard from Little Spanish Key, eh?"

Mr. Meserve failed to see the vivid blush that overcast the ingenuous lineaments of his son, for he was shaking hands with Captain Canova, and eying that mariner with an oddly puzzled air. This was a novel type of hero indeed. Why, the man behaved as if he would be more annoyed by the loss of a gilt button than by the loss of his vessel. The successful merchant and capitalist had begun to mistrust his judgments of men and motives. Certainly the friends that Thomas had made were able to meet the most elemental tests of manhood. Captain Rafael Canova waved aside the father's somewhat labored compliments, and addressed Thomas with a laugh:

"Miss Eastabrook was most anxious about you. She asked me many questions—if Long Key was a safe place to be in a hurricane, and what I thought of your chances, and so on. *Carramba!* I am glad I did not know that you were blown out to sea in Number Ten. If your father does not realize it, I must tell him that you are a lucky fellow, always lucky, whether it is base-ball or love or shipwreck."

"Not to mention spring-guns," said Hogan.

Thomas arose abruptly and retreated forward. This persiflage was too confoundedly personal, thought he, and besides, there was a possibility that Helen might appear on deck before the steamer should reach Key West in the star-lit hours. Long he lingered in the enchanted region near her door,

watched the steward enter and depart with a supper tray, and reluctantly went below to join the others at table. There Hogan persisted in making tactless, brutal comments regarding the non-appearance of Mr. Stephen Eastabrook, who preferred the seclusion of the mate's quarters. Thomas lost his temper, surmising that a disloyal alliance against him had been patched up between his father and the sergeant, and would have nothing whatever to say to them.

In a rebellious mood he fled on deck, and after another weary round of sentry duty beheld Helen Eastabrook step from the captain's room and turn toward a long steamer-chair which had been placed close to the deck-house. In a moment he was beside her. Little he cared whether or not the borrowed "dunnage" of the captain's wife fitted her slender figure. Certainly the white mantilla which covered her hair and framed her face was a bewitching bit of attire.

To his anxious queries she told him that she was wretchedly tired but unharmed, and they fell to relating their adventures, each with sympathetic sighs for the other's woes. Finally she said with a mirthful ripple of laughter:

"What a blood-and-thunder kind of acquaintance ours has been! We have been like two stormy petrels, haven't we? Even that base-ball game was a

regular tempest. Do you ever have any quiet, conventional moments, Mr. Winthrop?"

"My last name is not Winthrop. It is Meserve," frankly confessed Thomas.

"How very shocking!" cried she. "My last name is not Eastabrook. It is Rockwell."

"Good Lord! You are not married, are you?" he groaned.

"What chance have I had to meet eligible young men on Little Spanish Key?" said she.

"Don't tease me. This is too serious, Miss—Miss—it is *Miss* Rockwell, is it not?"

"Certainly, Mr. Winthrop-Meserve. And what crime drove *you* to this disguise, may I ask?"

Thomas gulped and stammered:

"Ask my father. He is eminently respectable, and is a walking voucher for me. You have only to look at him to know he is a savings-bank director, believes in high tariff, is a vestryman, and a right bower in organized philanthropy. I played hookey from college. That is my blackest crime."

"What you want to ask, and haven't the courage, is, How about *my* father?" was her startling remark.

"No, you don't have to tell me that," he cried. "I shall not ask you to." His speech was stumbling as he went on: "I cannot tell you how much I have admired you for standing up for him in such a stunning way. Your loyalty is magnificent. I

heard all about your pitching into those railroad officials that day at the base-ball field. I tell you, you saved him that time."

"That day at the base-ball game?" she echoed in blank surprise. "Why, I do not remember having to befriend my father. Two of those gentlemen were old acquaintances whom I met by chance, and they asked after father's health and sent him their regards! What twisted idea have you in that foolish head of yours?"

"You did not tell them that even if he were a criminal he ought to be left alone and given a chance to make a new start? You did not beg them to keep away from his trail, and all that sort of thing?" faltered Thomas.

"Oh, you goose!" and she laughed aloud. "I was discussing *you* with the general manager, Mr. Barrett. Your father had written him, demanding that you be sent home. And I was silly enough to intercede."

"Why? Did you care?" The voice of Thomas fluttered and he was breathing faster than usual.

"I—I was interested in your welfare. I was afraid I was going to lose a playmate," she bravely confessed.

"Oh, you cannot lose me!" very earnestly exclaimed the youth. "In fact, if I have anything to say about it, you are never, never going to lose me.

There is a plain statement of fact. Of course you will throw me down, but, like my bunkie Hogan, the harder I fall the higher I bounce."

"What about my father? Are you unwilling to lose him, too?" she returned with evasive, mocking sweetness.

"Hang your— Forgive me. I do not mean it, Helen, whether he deserves hanging or not. My father is fully as hard a proposition to handle. Can't we pair them off? I don't ask you to marry mine, and I am not expecting to marry yours."

She rose and gravely regarded him, her eyes luminous in the starlight.

"I must tell you good-night," she said. "I am very, very tired. Don't think I have been making fun of you, Tommy. You are as brave and foolish and nice as you can be. But don't you think that you and I ought to get our respective fathers tamed before we can be real, true playmates?"

She had vanished before Thomas came out of his trance and peevishly muttered:

"She never gave me any satisfaction at all. How can I tell where I stand? There is one thing sure. I am going to have it out with *my* father, right away.

CHAPTER XV

CONCERNING HER FATHER AND HIS

THE fugitive Freshman sat in a rocking-chair on the piazza of the Key West Hotel and glowered darkly at the leisurely traffic of the narrow street. Since landing from the fruiter the night before, he had evaded his father, diplomatic relations having arrived at the acute state, so to speak. Their last interview had been brief, explosive, and decisive. After fighting his way through construction camps, spring-guns, base-ball, and shipwreck, the conquering march of Thomas had been checked with humiliating abruptness. In short, he had run, full tilt and head down, into the immovable body, and he could no longer be classed as an irresistible force. This collision with a pillar of society had sadly bruised his spirits. In a few incisive, well-chosen words, Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr., had conveyed the information that an engagement of marriage without his consent would limit the young man's income to his trifling earnings as a very minor foreman of a railway construction camp, and that for

lack of technical education his chances of advancement were almost negligible.

This problem appeared more serious in the bright glare of day than it had by starlight, with a white lace mantilla in the foreground. Love in a bungalow on a palm-fringed key was a most charming possibility, but what if a fellow could not even build the bungalow, not to mention supplying the contents thereof? Furthermore, and even worse than this, if his audacious, wonderful dream should come true and Helen accepted him as a playmate for good and all, how could he hope to persuade her father to forsake the war-path and view him favorably?

"As a foreman on Long Key, he will never allow me to come within gun-shot of her again, spring-guns included," he dismally reflected. "And can you blame him? I have a fine lot of prospects to spread on the counter for his inspection. Hogan has pulled me through every other difficulty, but he can't help me here, and besides, he has gone over to the enemy. Well, I think I will send another bunch of flowers and a few more kind words to her room, on the chance that they run the gauntlet of her impossible parent. If I could only see her again, I believe I might live until sunset."

Just then Sergeant Hogan rounded the nearest corner, arm in arm with two non-commissioned officers from the garrison, and broke away from them to

hurry across the street and cheerily accost the frowning Freshman.

"I did an enlistment with those two lads," he explained. "I have just finished lecturin' them on me favorite topic, the curse of drink. They are on their way to sip the invigoratin' lemonade with me. Will you join us, Tommy?"

"I like your nerve, I must say," moodily replied the youth. "I never dreamed of your going back on me, Jack. You have filled *my* father full of your horrible suspicions about *her* father, and you have basely ruined my fair young life. You began it by muddling everything up at the base-ball game. The story you told me was all moonshine. She never said a word to those railroad officials about her father's checkered past. She was putting in a good word for *me*, you meddlesome, twistified old trouble-maker you!"

"Harsh words, brutal words, Thomas," and Hogan grinned without malice. "I am going back to work at Long Key to-night, and you will be sorry for this after I'm gone from ye. I am sore disappointed that I have not broke you of the old tricks of bleating and whimpering and blaming others for your misdeeds and your side-steppin' tactics. Have ye caved in entirely? Are you too blind to see the chance of your life? Here ye have the two heavy-armored parents within point-blank range of each

other. Have ye tried to bring 'em together? Let them bump an' have it out. I will borrow the garrison band an' play 'em into action. 'Tis the proper strategy for them to fight it out to a finish."

"How can I introduce them to each other, Jack? I have not even dared to tell my father that her father is using a false name. It would make matters look blacker than ever."

"Holy Moses! ye will not have to do any introducin'," jubilantly cried Hogan, who was gazing at the farther end of the hotel piazza. "Will ye look at the two fathers, yours and hers, coming out of the café door like a pair of old college chums. Here is where I retreat at the double-quick. 'Tis no place for me."

Thomas bolted from his rocking-chair, dodged from behind the amazed sergeant, and beheld the parents twain advancing, arm in arm, and engaged in smiling, animated discourse. The father of Helen smote the father of Thomas a resounding thump on the shoulder, and a loud "ha, ha!" answered a jovial "well, well."

"'Tis the curse of drink," murmured Hogan, who lingered, rooted in his tracks. "They are coming straight from the hotel bar. They have forgotten who they are."

Thomas was too bewildered to resent this slur upon his family name, and stared foolishly until the

mirthful, chummy parents were near enough for him to hear his own father exclaim:

"But the newspapers all said you were in Europe, Rockwell. I have been trying my best to locate you for the last three months. I wanted to give you a chance, on the ground floor, to take two millions of those Oregon Railroad bonds. I owed you a favor in a business way. Well, it is not too late, though I have not made a practice of transacting such matters with outlaws."

"All my guns are spiked. The piazza is entirely too crowded for me. What kind of a false alarm was I guilty of, I want to know?" whispered Hogan, with which he fled, for once ignominiously routed, and hasted after his thirsty friends from the garrison. Mr. Meserve actually looked roguish as he beckoned Thomas, and announced:

"Rockwell, this is my son. I understand that you and he have met before. He enjoyed your hospitality, I believe."

"I almost blew his head off. He was a most desperate-looking young villain," said Mr. Saunders P. Rockwell, alias Stephen Eastabrook. "How do you do, young man? Will you shake hands with me and accept the most profound apologies? Really, that spring-gun affair surprised me fully as much as it did you."

The Freshman looked askance at the ruddy coun-

tenance of this puzzling gentleman who had loomed so large in his destinies, and courteously replied:

"You have me guessing, Mr. Rockwell, and things seem to be happening faster than I can keep track of them. But the past is forgotten, thank you kindly, and I rather think you handled me about as I deserved."

"Handsomely said," blandly observed his father. "Let us sit down and explain matters all round. This has been a most extraordinary mare's nest of misunderstandings. I feel as if I had been in the midst of a hurricane for several days and nights. Rockwell, before my sanity is permanently impaired, will you be good enough to finish the interrupted story of your exile?"

Mr. Saunders P. Rockwell of Chicago lighted a large cigar and responded between puffs:

"I told you about all. After consulting more specialists than you could count without an adding-machine, the gist of their expensive verdicts was that I must absolutely quit business for one solid year or risk a hurried exit from apoplexy or something of the sort. I fought hard but I was outnumbered. No dawdling around Europe for me! There was no getting away from cables and newspaper reporters and pestiferous promoters and capitalists with gold bricks to market. I needed plain living, hard work, and something wholesome to play with. Years ago

I cruised through these keys and remembered the pineapple patches and the splendid fishing, and the surprising isolation of it all. My daughter was sufficiently devoted to offer to come down with me, and we were having the finest time you ever saw in your life."

"But what induced you to stay through the summer?" asked Mr. Meserve.

"I have worked out thirty pounds of fat since the first of May, and I never felt so fit," cried Saunders P. Rockwell. "My pineapple patch was a beauty. I couldn't run away and leave it, could I? And I succeeded in keeping under cover until this boy of yours ran me to earth."

"He thought you had robbed a bank, Rockwell, but he was willing to overlook it."

"I have gathered in a few banks in my time, Meserve, but my methods were never so crude as that. Well, I suppose I must go North. I am discovered. The jig is up. I feel strong enough to stand the Stock Exchange on its head. I suppose I had better deed what is left of my happy home on Little Spanish Key to old Levi."

Saunders P. Rockwell sighed heavily. Like an echo, a sigh escaped the troubled soul of young Thomas Winthrop Meserve, who seemed to have been altogether left out of the reckoning. Mr. Rockwell transfixed him with a searching glance and asked:

"Going back to college, young man?"

"I suppose so. I really don't know. My plans are up in the air," confessed the youth. "The piazza is so densely populated with captains of industry that a horny-handed laborer is out of his class. If you will excuse me, father, I think I will walk out and enjoy the sea-breeze. I feel very dizzy. You move too fast for me."

He went no farther than the stationer's, however, when a glad inspiration made him dash within, buy paper, and hastily write as follows:

My Dear Playmate:

I have been waiting for a bulletin from you since breakfast. I hope with all my heart that you are recovering from the wear and tear and will be down-stairs soon. All is discovered. I know who you are, the daughter of a plutocrat. My father and yours have met, and are swapping railroads or planning to take them away from other malefactors of great wealth. So far poor Romeo has been overlooked. I hope to learn my fate ere long. But I cannot see how my father can object to your father, nor how your father can object to—oh, pshaw! the farther I go the rasher it sounds. Helen, if this brace of reunited parents fix matters up so that spring-guns, man-traps, and disinherited heirs vex us no more, will you let me say it over again? You know what I mean; that you will never, never be able to lose me? Here comes Levi ambling straight for the hotel. He will carry this note to you. Please, oh, please, send some kind of an answer by him.

Yours forever and ever,

T. W. M.

"Here, you Levi," called Thomas. "Wait for an answer if you love your life."

"Sure you ain't gwine to lose th' answer this time?" chuckled the faithful servant. "Suttinly, I'll hot-foot it to Miss Helen's hotel apa'tments an' 'splain how you is fidgetin' and prancin' up an' down King Street."

Thomas lacked courage to return to the hotel and wait, and he was pacing to and fro in front of the stationer's when Levi came rocking along at a clumsy gallop.

"She's lookin' peart and shiny-eyed, she sure is," he panted. "I was to tell you 'specially that she'd be please' to see you in her settin'-room at four o'clock this evenin'. Yo' letter sure done her a heap o' good. She tole me to give you this."

It was a note in answer, nor did the wind this time blow it away from the eager grasp of the recipient, who read simply this and nothing more:

If you will promise to go back to college, you may say it again.

"Levi, you are my mascot," cried Thomas, fumbling through his pockets in a wild and futile search for coin of the realm. "Here, you run over to the hotel and tell my father to give you a ten-dollar bill and charge it to my account. If he asks for me, say that I have gone down to the wharf to be alone with my thoughts."

Father and son met in their rooms an hour later and the elder Thomas remarked to the younger Thomas:

"I have known Saunders Rockwell for several years, but only in a business way. Of course, I did not know that he had a very lovely young daughter. There has been a great deal of needless commotion, Thomas. While of course I cannot speak for your mother, I may say that whatever obstacles existed —that is—I would most heartily approve if Miss Rockwell should be willing, later, to consider an engagement with you. This is, of course, premature, for you have seen each other but a few times, and of course you are both absurdly young, and——"

"Now, father," and the accents of Thomas, Jr., were loftily patronizing. "You must leave all that to me. After observing the swiftness of your own business methods when you really wake up, do you think I have been letting any tropical vegetation grow under my feet? Most emphatically not. Miss Helen Rockwell knows everything that has happened to-day, and it is not impossible that she will be willing to take you as a father-in-law."

"As a father-in-law! Such assurance is hardly gentlemanly, Thomas. You take too much for granted."

"Unless all signs fail, she is willing to take me for

better or for worse. There is a condition attached. I must return to college."

"When—how—where did you—you are fooling me, you rascal!" excitedly implored his father.

Thomas smoothed the crumpled bit of paper clutched in his fist, let his father glance at it, and joyously declaimed:

"Just forget me until after four o'clock. I can't stop to talk to you another minute."

Thereupon he took to his heels and Thomas, Sr., set out to find Mr. Saunders Rockwell and go into executive session with the other parent involved. While they smoked and chatted at a table in the café, two survivors of Quarter-boat Number Ten entered from the street and rested their elbows upon the bar at the opposite side of the room. One of them, a well-built, grayish man, said to the other, who no more than came to his shoulder:

"Well, Jonesey, old sport, here's to better luck and better weather on the old job! I hope you can stand it. You are worse broken up than any of the rest of us."

The little book-keeper, more of a shred of a man than before his shattering experience with the sea, coughed and picked up his glass with unsteady hand.

"I shall have to go back and stick it out somehow, McFarland. I guess I'll feel stronger after a while. But it gives me the horrors to think of living on one of those keys again."

Saunders Rockwell was staring at the sad and discouraged little figure, and as Jones turned so that his profile was visible, the man of millions roared with tremendous vehemence:

"Henry Jones, come here! What the deuce are you talking about? Why are you not at your desk in my office? Explain yourself."

Jones jumped clear off the floor and trotted to the table with more alacrity than seemed possible. His eyes were big, and his thin hands were picking at his coat as he stammered, quite breathless:

"Mr. Rockwell! Yes, sir. I—I thought you were abroad. It was this way, sir. Your office manager was careless and dishonest, in my opinion. I questioned some of his figures, Mr. Rockwell. I was interested in having things done right and shipshape. He told me that I was old and worn-out, and that my head was full of scrambled eggs instead of brains—those were his very words, and he discharged me. I came down here because my money was all gone. I went east to New York to try my luck. I hope you are in better health, Mr. Rockwell."

"Scrambled eggs!" thundered the magnate. "I will scramble *him*. Do you suppose I would have kicked you out, Jones? Why man, I intended to pension you on full pay next year. You jump on the first boat out of here and you go straight to Chicago. Figure out the amount of your back salary and I will

give it to you now. It is high time that I was homeward bound. Meserve, let us pick up our children and get under way as quick as the Lord will let us. Fired old Henry Jones! Bring your friend over, Jones. I like his looks."

Tim McFarland's impulsive, loyal heart was so stirred with joy and thanksgiving that he furtively dashed a tear from his weatherbeaten cheek as he held out a hand to Saunders Rockwell and shouted:

"I'd rather have it happen to Jones than to me. He is a fine little man, God bless him! His friends will miss him. It's a poor hurricane that blows nobody good." Turning to Mr. Meserve, the grizzled short-stop said with a smile:

"I suppose young Thomas will jump the league and sign on with you. I'm sorry you couldn't see him pitch against the Sand-Fleas. Will you send him back to pitch for his college?"

"I expect so, Mr. McFarland. Do you think he will stay there this time?"

"He has learned one thing with us tarriers," said the other. "If he once puts his two hands to a job, you'll have to chloroform him to make him let go. I wouldn't worry much about his making good in college."

"Thank you. And I hope he will never lose track of the friends he has made. They will be my friends, too," returned the father, grateful for this candid

praise of his son. "I wish I might be of some service to you."

"My job was not washed away, and I am contented where I am. Like Jack Hogan, I want to stand by, through thick and thin, until the Long Key Viaduct is finished."

"I can use men like you and Hogan whenever you say the word," said Mr. Meserve, and Saunders Rockwell put in:

"I shall try to outbid you. I want them myself."

Mr. Timothy McFarland bluffly said his farewells and, as if in duty bound to take care of Henry Jones as long as possible, towed that rescued derelict from the café to have him refitted at the nearest clothing store.

"Well, Rockwell, how do you like that boy of mine?" asked Meserve.

"A bang-up, manly chap. And I like his friends. How do you like that girl of mine?"

"I wish she were my daughter, Rockwell."

The two men clasped hands across the table, and were silent for some time. Although neither spoke the thought, it was obvious that they were waiting for tidings from their children. At length young Thomas entered with hasty step, and the bearing of a conqueror. No need to ask what news he bore. His voice was unsteady as he stood smiling at the parents and said:

"We have decided to put up with our fathers if they will be good enough to congratulate us."

"Hooray!" cried Saunders Rockwell.

"With all my heart," ejaculated Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr. "Sit down, my dear boy. I shall have the honor of giving you a dinner-party to-night, if Miss Helen is able to be present."

"She will be there, father. And may I ask Hogan to stay over? He has been the little god from the machine, always on the job."

"Certainly, Thomas. I was fortunate enough to find a really handsome gold watch in one of the shops this morning, and the jeweller is engraving it as a rush order. It will be ready to present to Sergeant Hogan at dinner. It is an apology from me, in a way. I was slow to appreciate what the man has done for you. I shall hold a position open for him indefinitely."

"Not if I see him first," spoke up Saunders Rockwell.

"Now, Thomas," said his sire, "can you come down to earth for a moment? The circumstances are so exceptional that Mr. Rockwell and I have let ourselves be carried off our feet. You are going back to college, of course."

The Freshman hesitated, was much flustered, and replied with a dubious nod:

"I can break into the Sophomore class this fall by

tutoring hard for the next month or two. But that means three years more, and a fellow is forbidden to marry while he is an undergraduate, sir. The faculty won't stand for it. Great heavens! do you expect us to wait three years?"

"You are not twenty-one yet, Thomas. And she is——"

"Twenty and three months and two days," promptly replied the youth. "We are old enough to know what we want, and life is short."

"If I have any vested rights in this pair of children, permit me to remark that they will wait until this bold Lochinvar has annexed his diploma," exclaimed Saunders Rockwell, and his fist banged the table.

"I agree with you," said the other parent.

"I am beaten, and I hereby surrender," cried Thomas. "I will talk it over with Helen, and if she consents we have no more objections to offer."

CHAPTER XVI

THE RIVAL 'VARSITY PITCHERS

Tom Meserve, an exile come back to his own kingdom, was gazing at the Elmsford campus from a window of his old rooms, and his hand rested affectionately upon the shoulder of his comrade, Howard Craig. Theirs was, indeed, a jubilant reunion, and the Sophomore year lay before them, a year which should be made worth while. Faithful Craig had been immensely interested in the tale of moving adventures by land and sea, as endured by the young Ulysses who had won his diploma as a man among men. There was new modesty and reserve in Tom's speech and manner, a certain soberness in his way of looking at things, as if he had taken to heart the stern lessons hammered into him.

Craig had smiled and nodded approvingly during the narrative, but he was somewhat dazed by the sentimental climax. Tom's letters had failed to convince his matter-of-fact room-mate that the "girl proposition" was to be taken very seriously, but the story of the enamoured young man, as it fell from his own lips, left no room for scepticism.

As they stood together by the window on this, the opening day of the college year, Howard Craig, who had been turning various serious thoughts over in his mind, spoke up abruptly:

"I suppose you will be flying off to see her every little while, eh, Tommy?"

"Not on your life," cried our hero, with the utmost emphasis. "You have sized me up all wrong, Howard. Helen and I have agreed to be as sane and sensible as two young owls, and I expect to see her during the Christmas vacation, and not until then." The fist of Thomas thumped the window-sill as he declaimed. "I have come back to college to make good, and she will not stand for neglect of duty."

"You *have* changed a whole lot," said Craig, as if this proof were final. "Now I know that this is no butterfly, summer-girl romance. I am anxious to meet this wonderful Helen Rockwell, who has wrought such a miracle with our flighty and fickle Thomas. What is to be the year's programme? Base-ball, I suppose. How about study? Are you going to try for a high stand in scholarship as well as a high batting average?"

"As high as I can climb," asserted Tom. "What else am I here for? A man cannot be really happy unless he is working hard at something or other. Why, any bucko of my quarter-boat gang would think this a picnic of a job—no more than five or six

hours' work a day to keep your record right up to the mark."

Thomas hesitated, fidgeted, and blushed perceptibly before he resumed in less confident tones:

"Say, Howard, I haven't dared to mention it, but what happened when my father came charging into town and found me missing? Was the scene very painful, and did he rage tremendously?"

"Wasn't that all threshed out with him in Key West?" incredulously demanded Craig.

"No-o, I never referred to it during that love-feast," confessed the other. "The topic was far from pleasing to me, and it seemed diplomatic to let father spring it first. But apparently he did not wish to cloud the glad return of the prodigal son, and the sad episode of my flight from college was entirely side-tracked."

Craig turned aside lest the anxious Thomas might observe the mirth that made the corners of his mouth twitch, but his accents were weightily serious as he made answer:

"It would harrow your feelings to recall it, Tommy. Let sleeping dogs lie. Post-mortems will do no good. Your father is a difficult man to manage, and you certainly did leave me with a load of trouble on my hands."

"But about my debts," solicitously put in Thomas. "I made several tactful attempts to bring the mat-

ter up after I went home to Cleveland, but father's countenance was such a fine imitation of a thundercloud that I shivered in my shoes and lost my nerve."

"We discussed you," replied Howard with much dignity, "and your father decided that the receivership should stand through Sophomore year, that is, if you were permitted to return to college. And as I have had no further instructions since he picked you up in the Gulf Stream, that goes, my son."

"Fair enough, and I am lucky to be let off so easy," exclaimed Thomas. "Then I shall pay off my debts out of this year's allowance. Do you think we can find cheaper rooms and save a little in that way?"

"No, your receiver has no fault to find with the item of room-rent," gravely returned Howard. "But perhaps you can save a bit from your dollar a week of spending money."

Thomas was fumbling in his pockets and hastily withdrew a small, paper-covered book which he displayed with a triumphant flourish.

"My savings-bank account, old man. I tucked away the wages I earned on the keys as a fund to help pay my own way through college. It belongs to my receiver. Take it and spread it around among my creditors. There is a lot of satisfaction in feeling that I can do something on my own account. Gee

whiz! but I slaved for every dollar of it. One thing more. Did he find the infernal document in the second volume of the 'World's Great Orators,' as we had figured it out?"

"Better forget it," was the rejoinder. "It gives me a shuddery, all-gone feeling to think of that scene with Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr."

"Right you are," blithely declared the sunny-tempered Thomas. "Now, let's get busy and look the crowd over and mix into the game again. I tell you, a fellow doesn't realize what a great thing it is to be an Elmsford man until he has come as near as I did to losing the chance. And the base-ball squad will be called out for some autumn practice before long. I am going to be the 'varsity pitcher this year, Howard."

Picking up their caps, the pair of Sophomores clattered downstairs and plunged into the tide of noisy, happy young manhood which was eddying between dormitories, recitation rooms, and lecture halls. Tom Meserve was welcomed with a genuine enthusiasm that made his heart glow. There was no end of interesting gossip to be gleaned from this old friend and that, and ere long he chanced to meet a classmate, Stanley Stokes by name, with whom he had trained in the Freshman base-ball squad of the preceding year. Thomas instantly demanded a detailed report of the outlook for the 'varsity nine and

was, of course, particularly anxious to know about the pitching talent.

"The pace will be pretty fast for you," quoth Stokes. "Elmsford will have a strong combination in the box. Meredith developed wonderfully last season, and pitched three great games in the championship series against Markham. He comes back this year as a Senior, you know. Then there is a new chap in our class—his name is Harry Peterson—none of our crowd knew him last year. He is said to be a phenomenon. The rules barred him from the 'varsity in Freshman year, and he refused to play with the class team. There is something fishy about him. He is not exactly a mucker, but he won't quite do. He doesn't seem to belong in college."

"Oh, he must be straight enough. Elmsford doesn't want ball-players who are anything else than genuine students! You sound like a false alarm, Stokesey, old sport. Trying to frighten me?"

"No, you just wait till you have a chance to size up this big Peterson for yourself. Oh, the athletic management is not guilty, I do not mean to insinuate that, but I have a sneaking suspicion that one or two Elmsford alumni with more money than good sense may be responsible for Peterson's presence in our midst. You know the kind, graduates who have not outgrown the campus, who think the college can't

exist unless it wins base-ball and foot-ball championships right along."

"I don't believe a word of it," was the rude comment of doubting Thomas. "The faculty would never stand for it."

"But how is the faculty to know anything about it, as long as Peterson doesn't flunk his examinations?" said Stokes. "I am not such a blithering ass as I look. You take my tip, and judge for yourself."

Thomas recalled Stanley Stokes as a canny youth, both on the diamond and the campus, and inwardly resolved to scrutinize this formidable rival of a Peterson. The opportunity came during the short season of batting and fielding practice in the pleasant weather of early autumn when the 'varsity captain took in hand such candidates as were not training with the foot-ball teams or the class crews. It was speedily evident that Peterson was a base-ball player of great skill and experience who was likely to crowd the veteran Meredith out of first position. Thomas tried to banish the prejudice inspired by Stokes's suspicions and made friendly overtures, which Peterson received with a sort of surly, clumsy indifference. He was a powerful, splendidly muscled young athlete, in build resembling Sergeant Jack Hogan, but in disposition not at all like that cheery, warm-hearted soldier of fortune. His mind seemed to be concentrated on the one purpose of pitching for the

Elmsford nine, and he gave the impression that he intended to let nothing stand in his way.

Tom Meserve was manly enough to feel no jealousy, for he had learned the wholesome doctrine of a fair field and no favor. But Peterson, misled by Tom's boyish appearance and pleasant demeanor, made the mistake of trying to bully and intimidate him, as if hoping to shake his self-confidence. Such tactics might have succeeded with the average Sophomore, but they failed to daunt a late foreman of Quarter-boat Number Ten, and Thomas only laughed in his sleeve, and worked harder than ever to show the captain and coaches that he could pitch as strongly and craftily as Peterson or Meredith.

The autumn term passed without notable incident, and the industrious Thomas earned his reward in the delight of a Christmas vacation with Helen, and in a most satisfactory visit to the paternal mansion in Cleveland. He found time to write a long letter to Jack Hogan, and took honest pride in telling his former guardian that he was "making good." The reply was delayed and Tom had returned to college when he received this bulletin, written in the sergeant's vivid and compact style.

DEAR THOMAS WINTHROP:

Most of the old gang are still on the job, and the Long Key Viaduct will be finished on time in spite of what the hurricane did to us. It is big work, lad, and I wish you could have seen

it through with us. But you are doing your duty where you are, and it makes me feel like ready money to hear you are making a clean time-sheet with the professors and tearing the lining out of the study-books. Get to it, my boy, for it is the lads with the learning under their hats that bosses the likes of us whose knowledge is mostly in their hands and feet, and the strength of their backs.

Tim McFarland, and a better man never handled a gang of tarriers, he was terribly interested in what you had to say about your college base-ball. He is one of your chronic old war-horses that smelleth the battle from afar. So if you have a fond thought in your heart for Tim, sit down and write him all about your team and your own chances to win out as a slab-artist, and all the rest of the dope. He will be tickled right down to the ground.

We miss you, boy, and whenever a bunch of the old lads that was in Number Ten sit around a fire of a night-time and fight mosquitoes and swap lies, there is always a good word for the tow-headed kid that put the crimp in Terry Flynn, and was as game as a pebble when we were drifting out to sea with all hades broke loose. No more for the present from yours for keeps,

JOHN HOGAN,
Ex-Sergeant D Co. 9th U. S. Infantry.

Tom's eyes glistened and he coughed suspiciously. The letter stirred his emotions more than he cared to show, but it also braced him anew to fight the good fight and be a credit, not only to his family, but also to Quarter-boat Number Ten. He intended writing Tim McFarland at once, but the season was early

for base-ball news, and he postponed the congenial task through one week after another, hoping to have some tidings worth while.

Then a momentous event occurred. Meredith, the crack pitcher of the preceding year, was a careless student, and had unwisely chosen to play football instead of using the fall season to improve his standing in scholarship. The result was that he fell badly below the average ranking demanded of Elmsford athletes and failed satisfactorily to respond to repeated warnings from the faculty. At last, when the base-ball season was well advanced, he disastrously "flunked" one examination test after another, and faced the choice of quitting base-ball for the year, or of being separated from college.

With a very wry face and hearty denunciation of a faculty which treated a 'varsity athlete so abominably, Meredith elected to stay with his class and forsake the diamond. It was a hard blow to the captain, and the campus sputtered its sympathetic indignation, heedless of the fact that the victim had brought his fate upon his own head.

The battle for first place as pitcher therefore lay between Tom Meserve and the doughty Peterson. Now that the spring season was at high tide and 'varsity honors were at stake, the latter showed his real mettle, and the crowd of undergraduates that watched the daily practice soon forgot to bewail the

loss of Meredith. Tom Meserve was pitching in splendid form, but he had to confess to himself that he did not know as much base-ball as the brawny Peterson, who seemed to have nothing to learn from the coaches. Tom had played with old-time professionals at Key West, and their manner of handling themselves was suggested by the style in which Peterson batted and fielded. He was a master of the finer points of the game, of the trifles overlooked by the amateur, and there was never a moment when he was to be caught napping.

"As well try to rattle a brick house," sighed Thomas. "I have the speed, the curves, and the control, but he has forgotten more base-ball than I ever knew. Who the dickens is he, and where does he hail from?"

This was a riddle indeed, but the suspicions fostered by Stanley Stokes seemed impossible of proof. Peterson attended recitations faithfully, maintained a creditable standing in his classes, and appeared anxious to be both a good student and a first-class athlete. Yet as Tom watched him play ball day after day, he was bothered by the notion that there was a hidden flaw in his rival's college career. Moreover, Thomas could not rid himself of the vague impression that he had seen this Peterson play elsewhere, though he could not for the life of him clinch the surmise. It was an illusive sense of some-

thing familiar in his appearance and manner of carrying himself on the field. All his puzzlement, however, led nowhere, and the tangible fact, admitting of no doubt, was that Thomas Meserve had the contest of his life on his hands if he hoped to be selected to pitch the championship games for Elmsford.

He was not too absorbed in this vital issue to forget his intention of writing to Tim McFarland, and after one of the early season games against a smaller college he sat at his desk and scribbled page after page of such base-ball lingo as should delight the soul of the grizzled old short-stop in his camp on the far-away key. Tom had much to say about Peterson, with nothing but fair words for the remarkable ability of his arch foeman of the diamond. The letter duly posted, Thomas thought no more of Tim McFarland for some time. Now and then he wondered why his old friend did not reply, but took it for granted that he was no great hand at correspondence under the most favorable auspices.

At length, when a month and more had passed, there came a letter from Long Key which made Tom gasp. The news it brought was a revelation that instantly demanded the aid and counsel of Howard Craig. Luckily the room-mate was within hailing distance, and as he responded to the distress signals, Tom blurted tremulously:

"Lock the door, old man, I want to read this letter to you."

"Is it another death warrant?" asked the other. "You haven't been as flustered since the mix-up with 'The World's Greatest Orators.' I thought I knew all your guilty secrets by this time."

"It is from good old Tim McFarland," explained Thomas, who was pale with excitement. "No, I must not tell it wrong end to. You will not be able to understand unless I read it to you, every word of it. Life certainly does consist of one darn thing after another."

Craig waited with that composed demeanor which he could assume whenever Tom became rampant, but his face mirrored many intense emotions as he listened to the following extraordinary tidings from the pen of Tim McFarland:

DEAR FRIEND TOM:

There is a strong lad in your college by the name of Harry Peterson, and he is pitching ball on the team with you. I said nothing about him when you were down here on the job with us. I had reasons of my own. He has been writing to me lately, and he has put me wise to certain facts that make me shift my tactics. The boy is a nephew of mine, the son of an only sister that is dead and gone, and I have been a kind of daddy to him since he was knee-high to a grasshopper, or thereabouts. My record is nothing for him to be proud of —you get that, don't you?—and when I was piped off to the fact that you hailed from Elmsford College, I laid low, not

wanting to queer Harry's game by letting you know that he was kin to old Tim McFarland, the has-been.

However, this Harry Peterson is all right and he means to be on the level, but his play has been getting complicated. I have talked it over with Jack Hogan and he agrees with me that the situation ought to be put up to you, because we know that you are a thoroughbred, and will take this as confidential, understand?

The trouble began to stew when I wrote this nephew of mine that you and I had been pals and shipmates, not to speak of playing red-hot ball together against the Sand-Fleas. And this meant that I was ready to fight for you as quick as I would for him.

Then I got a letter from the boy to say that he wasn't at all pleased with himself, and begged me to hand him out a bunch of advice. To go back a bit, this Harry Peterson was ambitious to get a tip-top education and nothing could stop him. I backed his game as far as I could, but that wasn't very far. He was going to school winters and pitching ball with a team of bush leaguers in the summer-time, and saving all he could out of his salary as a ball player. He wanted to go to college bad, but the proposition didn't frame up until a couple of sporty gents from New York cut his trail and took an interest in him. They had been through your college, when the professors were not looking, I take it, for the base-ball department was about all they were familiar with.

These rich guys told Harry to make tracks for your college, and they would stake him to his four years education, and he could study as hard as he liked, provided he would play ball for all he was worth and pitch for the everlasting glory of Elmsford, and all that 'rah 'rah business.

Now, there were no strict rules in college ball when I was

on the turf. And what rules there were against professionals was broken by the colleges smart enough to beat 'em on the quiet. So this proposition looked all to the good, as I sized it up, and I told Harry he deserved his good luck.

It seems that I am out of date, and the boy's contract makes him a college outlaw, so he tells me. Maybe he would have kept up the bluff for the rest of his course, because he is as genuine a student as ever took a fall out of a stack of books. But the fact that you are bucking him for first choice as 'varsity pitcher alters the case entirely, for now he knows that you are a solid friend of mine. And he knows, too, that I would no more stand for your being double-crossed than I'd put up with a raw deal being handed out to him.

To cut it short, Tommy, the lad feels that he has no right to stand in your way. It is against the rules for him to pitch college ball because he played a couple of seasons as a minor professional leaguer. It is his great test, and I hope and pray to God he is game to do the right thing. You will judge him fairly, for you know what it is to face the breaking strain. You were a quarter-boat man in Number Ten.

Promise me to keep your hands off and let the other lad work it out for himself. He does not know that I have put you next, but Jack Hogan says you won't squeal, and that the square thing is to tell you exactly where Harry stands and how he got into this tangle. If you find time, drop me a line. I am not sleeping sound since I found out that this boy of mine was up against a problem that is bound to make him or break him. He is the apple of my eye, Tommy. The world has used him rough, and he has a hard way with him, but I am betting my last dollar that his heart is sound.

Your faithful friend,

TIMOTHY MCFARLAND.

"What do you think of it, Howard?" asked Tom after an eloquent silence.

Craig flushed angrily and began to walk the floor. Sane and steady as he was by nature, his views of life and conduct were those of the campus, and his outlook no wider than its boundaries. A crime against this code of ethics was graver in his eyes than any extenuating circumstances that could be mustered in its defence. With all the intolerance of youth he burst out:

"I think it is perfectly outrageous, if you want my honest opinion. This blackguard of a Peterson ought to be kicked out of college. What did Stanley Stokes tell you? He hit the nail on the head. And the precious pair of alumni who put up the job ought to be exposed. That letter should be shown to the faculty at once. No other evidence is needed to show up the whole crooked business."

Thomas Winthrop Meserve smiled and patiently explained, as if he were talking to one younger than himself:

"I learned a good many things that are not in text-books when I was on the keys with Jack Hogan and Tim McFarland. If you had seen Fitzherbert, broken sot and beach-comber, go drifting off to sea in his barge and making the finish of a brave and high-hearted gentleman, you would not be so hasty to condemn other people, Howard. You

simply don't understand. Why, I never had a finer compliment than the confidence placed in me by Tim McFarland's letter. Don't you suppose he was shrewd enough to know that I should be tempted to do exactly what you suggest—show his letter to the faculty and, by getting rid of Harry Peterson, cinch my position as 'varsity pitcher?"

"He is working on your sympathy and your loyalty to him," grumbled Craig. "He was afraid you might find out from some other source that Peterson is a crooked athlete, so he spikes your guns. He makes you think it would be a low trick to give him away."

"Howard, you make me tired," cried Thomas. "You are talking all in the air. Peterson is no blackguard. Tim McFarland's letter is proof enough."

"But he has no right to play for Elmsford," protested the other. "It is your duty to see that he is barred from the nine."

"But can't you comprehend that this is his great test, just as Tim puts it?" persisted Tom. "We must give him the chance to work it out for himself. You have a wiser head than I, but when it comes to handling men and finding how much good there is in the worst of them—pooh, you are all at sea."

"And you mean to let Peterson play base-ball and crowd you out of the race?"

"For the present, that is precisely what I intend to do," calmly answered Thomas.

CHAPTER XVII

TIM McFARLAND'S NEPHEW

HARRY PETERSON was not the hardened villain and impostor that Craig, in his virtuous wrath, had made him out to be. He had entered Elmsford as a Freshman, with a dogged ambition to make the most of his opportunities, and he viewed his base-ball prowess as a means to an end. It had been a rare stroke of good fortune, as he regarded it at the time, that a brace of ardent Elmsford graduates should have made it possible for him to win his way to a diploma. He had attached little importance to their explanation that the arrangement must be kept secret. Associating with professional ball-players had caused him to look at this subterfuge as no more than a clever way of "beating the umpire," so to speak, besides which the college rules safeguarding the amateur spirit had seemed to him both illogical and unjust. A man might work his way through college by using his brains and muscle in any one of a hundred ways, and still be eligible for the 'varsity teams, but if he had employed his proficiency as an athlete to earn

money toward his education, he was tabooed and blacklisted.

For these reasons, which seemed sound enough to Peterson, he had kept his own counsel and concluded that his past record as a ball-player was nobody's business but his own. Through Freshman year he had been a tireless student. Freshmen were not permitted to play on the 'varsity nine, wherefore he had made the most of his time in order that there might be no danger of falling behind in scholarship when the arduous campaign of the diamond should engage his energies.

Little by little the spirit of the campus, the unwritten laws slowly builded by generations of tradition, had taken hold of Peterson and troubled his thoughts. He wanted to be something more than a successful student and athlete, and he gradually came to perceive that to be an Elmsford man and an Elmsford gentleman meant obedience to these same laws and traditions. The fellows talked very little about honor and fair play, but it was tacitly assumed, it was, in truth, in the campus atmosphere, that no victory was worth winning unless it was "on the square."

Peterson observed and pondered, and stubbornly argued with himself that his particular case was different from any other, and that it was unjust to call him guilty of wrong-doing. If he had broken the rules,

so much the worse for them. But he could not be happy in this conclusion, and more than once he wavered in his course. The alumni who had befriended him were the real traitors to their college. They were the ones who should have known better, thought he.

When Tom Meserve had first appeared for practice, Peterson instantly recognized that here was a rival to be feared. He perceived that this toughly seasoned youngster, with the steady nerve and the ready mind, would prove a more dangerous foeman than Meredith, and all his fighting blood was roused and his scruples thrown to the winds. And when Meredith was eliminated by faculty decree and the issue lay between Meserve and Peterson, the latter was in no mood to let conscience interfere with his grim determination to show himself the better man. If he should retire from the Elmsford nine it would not be because he was forced to quit by this jaunty, tow-headed class-mate.

This was the situation when Tim McFarland decided to inform his pugnacious nephew that this Tom Meserve was a dear friend of his, bound by the ties of all they had lived and suffered together. The sentences of his uncle's letter which Harry Peterson could not forget were these:

"And if you and Tom are playing ball together, you must be on the level with him, as you would be

with your Uncle Tim. You may not mix it up anywhere else, for he is likely to travel with the gilt-edge set, Harry, but on the diamond give him a little the best of it, because he was in Quarter-boat Number Ten with your Uncle Tim. I have not mentioned him to you before, because I don't like to butt in, me being nothing at all for you to be proud of, and a poor hand to pass up advice, but the base-ball season must be getting lively, and I want you to know that I could think no more of this Tom Meserve if he was your own brother."

These simple words greatly troubled Peterson, who brushed aside all his flimsy arguments in defence of his conduct, and looked the truth squarely between the eyes. The problem was no longer complex. It summed itself up in this concise reflection:

"Any friend of my Uncle Tim is a friend of mine, and that goes."

No longer was it a question of playing ball in violation of the college amateur rules. This had become a matter of minor importance. He was taking an unfair advantage of Tom Meserve, who by right should have a clear field as 'varsity pitcher, and he was not acting fairly toward his Uncle Tim. When it came to a clean-cut issue between man and man, Peterson's conception of duty was not in the least befogged. Like Thomas Meserve, he had been taught in a hard and elemental school beyond the

campus, a school in which personal loyalty meant something. Thomas had expressed all that was best in the doctrines of Sergeant Jack Hogan when, in the crucial moment, he had made his choice between going ashore and standing to his duty and had replied:

"We Quarter-boats hang together."

So, now, Harry Peterson, pulled this way and that by clashing motives, voiced a similar conviction in the words:

"Any friend of my Uncle Tim is a friend of mine."

It was an immensely difficult decision to face. To abandon his college base-ball career meant to forfeit the education that was most precious in his sight. It would mean, also, that he had been taking money for this purpose under false pretences. How and when should he be able to repay the funds he had already used in Freshman and Sophomore years? This and other aspects of the problem were so perplexing that the brooding young man sat himself down and poured out his heart on paper to Tim McFarland, explaining as well as he could how difficult the path of duty had suddenly become. The tidings so worried poor old Tim in his turn that he straightway sought Jack Hogan for light in the dark places. And the upshot of this conference was that Tim decided to confide in Tom Meserve as already narrated.

A week passed, and then a fortnight, and it began to look as if Craig's surmise had been correct. Peterson continued to play in the daily practice games, and it was a nip-and-tuck race between him and Tom Meserve, who sometimes had a shade the better of it because his rival's form was oddly uncertain as if he were stale or distraught. Peterson had abandoned his bullying tactics. His manner toward Tom was friendly in a hesitant, awkward fashion, and now and then Tom caught an expression of wistful, searching inquiry in the other man's eyes as if trying to read his thoughts. Tom maintained an unshaken confidence that Tim McFarland's nephew would do the right thing in his own good time, and paid no heed to Howard Craig's bantering disbelief and urgent demands that the matter be laid before the faculty.

The rival pitchers met thrice daily at the training table and greeted each other pleasantly, but each was scrutinizing the other, silently wondering when the dead-lock was to be broken. Would Tom Meserve betray Tim McFarland's confidence, or would Harry Peterson vindicate Tim's belief in him? The climax befell of an early evening in May when Tom was studying beside a window in his sitting-room, and Howard Craig had sallied forth to join a group of comrades who were singing at the campus fence. There came a knock at the door, and to

Tom's lusty summons Peterson entered, his tread heavy and deliberate, his strong face grave and composed as of a man whose mind was made up, regardless of consequence.

The two young men stood regarding each other, as if neither was anxious to speak first. Tom motioned toward a chair and Peterson sat down with a nod of thanks. Then he stared at the floor and knitted his brows before he glanced up to say, with a smile that singularly brightened his heavy features:

"Play ball, eh? Time for me to begin? Well, it isn't easy. I have pitched my last game for Elmsford, Meserve. It is up to you to win the championship against Markham, and I think you can do it."

Peterson nervously wadded his handkerchief into a ball and wiped his face, for he was perspiring rather more than the weather warranted. Feigning ignorance of what lay behind this announcement, Tom cried out sharply:

"What do you mean? The captain depends on you to be the mainstay of the nine, tho' I hope to beat you out before the season ends. You have not strained your arm, have you?"

"No, but I have overstrained my conscience," replied the other, and he was no longer smiling. "You see, it is this way. I didn't know until recently that you had been chums and shipmates with my uncle, Tim McFarland. He is the salt of the

earth, and his word is law with me." It was difficult for the speaker to proceed, and he gazed absently into space, and his lip quivered before he resumed:

"I shall not tell you the story of my life, Meserve, but I played some professional ball before I came to college. There were circumstances—well, never mind—I thought I was justified in saying nothing about it and pitching for the college. But when it comes to getting in your way—why, it looks all different. I got a letter from Long Key that changed my opinions. It said, for one thing, 'You must be on the level with him as you would be with your Uncle Tim.' I have no right to pitch against you, Meserve, understand? And I have come round to think that I shall be a better Elmsford man for chucking up my ball-playing."

Tom's eyes mirrored the most genuine admiration. Here was a man worthy to be a nephew to Tim McFarland, a chip of the old block. This was worth waiting for, and Howard Craig had been all wrong. Tom knew what the sacrifice meant, but apparently Peterson had no intention of revealing what his decision had cost him.

"I would a thousand times rather fight it out with you on the diamond, than to be the 'varsity pitcher by default," heartily exclaimed Thomas. "But I am not going to urge you to reconsider your proposition. Feeling as you do, you could not be satisfied

with yourself to play any more college ball. It is bully of you, simply great, and you have proved yourself to be the sandiest man in our class. Now you will give the fellows a chance to know you better, won't you?"

Peterson shook his head. "I don't expect to come back next year. I can't explain why. I shall not tell tales on certain men who are much older than I, and who ought to have known better—but no more base-ball means no more college. That is how I am situated. Well, I must be going. I hope you will forgive me for not coming to see you sooner, but it has been pretty hard to screw up my courage, and —and—I wouldn't have done it for anybody else than a pal of Uncle Tim."

He was gone before Thomas, who had felt uncommonly tongue-tied, could try to put his thanks in words. Howard Craig came in a little later and found his comrade sprawled upon a window-seat, absorbed in meditation.

"Come out of that trance," demanded Howard. "Dreaming of the girl, I suppose. Never mind, the summer vacation is coming."

"Harry Peterson has been here," said Tom, too busy with his own thoughts to deny the sentimental impeachment. "You owe him a most humble apology. He is the real thing, a good deal bigger even than I thought he could be."

"He confessed, did he? It was the only decent thing he could do."

"Oh, Howard, that doesn't sound like you," Thomas reproachfully exclaimed. "Peterson had me tied hand and foot. I could not have exposed him, you know that. Give him the credit he deserves. He said never a word about the price of his confession—not a whimper—no hard-luck story. He doesn't know that Tim McFarland has written me all the circumstances of the case. I tell you, it will be a crime if Harry Peterson has to give up college for lack of money. And of course he will feel that he ought to return every dollar that those sporty alumni, confound 'em, have given him for his expenses at Elmsford."

"There is not enough in the receiver's treasury to finance the deal, little Great-heart," quoth Howard. "It is a tough situation, but I fail to see how you can straighten it out."

"The deuce take you and your receivership!" angrily returned Tom. "Peterson is man enough to work his way through Junior and Senior years if he can manage to get on his feet and square up that hateful obligation to his backers. I shall write my father the whole story and ask his advice. When it comes to taking the kinks out of a knotty business problem, he is the genuine wizard of Wall Street."

"I am afraid you will have to leave Peterson to

fight his own battles," said the sagacious Craig. "You must have nothing to do with paying his debts or his bills, you know. It would never do—not for a minute. If it leaked out—even as a whisper, a rumor—the natural inference might be that you had bought him off in one way or another—side-tracked your hottest rival for the 'varsity nine. Go slow, Tommy. Better sleep over it."

"You have developed a most suspicious streak," growled Thomas, "but what you say is not without wisdom. I will saw wood and keep mum for the present, barring a letter to my father. He thinks the world of Tim McFarland."

There was much excitement on the campus when the news spread that Harry Peterson had resigned from the 'varsity nine. The captain was dumfounded and pleaded and stormed in vain. The stubborn pitcher would give no more reasons than that he could no longer afford the time demanded of a 'varsity athlete, and preferred winning the Phi Beta Kappa honors in scholarship to playing baseball for the glory of Elmsford. He was called hard names, accused of disloyalty, and found himself even less popular than before, but his massive, self-contained indifference to criticism could not be disturbed. His friendship with Tom Meserve could hardly be called an intimacy. Their relations were delicate and difficult to adjust. Tom dared not show the

sympathy he felt, lest Peterson might mistake it for pity. By tactful hint and question, he learned that the other man's tuition bills had been paid until the end of this college year, and that he intended remaining to pass the final examinations in June.

The season was drawing near to the championship base-ball series with Markham University, and Tom was relied on to bear the brunt of the pitching for Elmsford. He was absorbed heart and soul in preparing for this great task, and the campus, rallying from the shock of Peterson's desertion, grew mightily confident that Meserve was "good enough to turn the trick." For his part, he knew that he was fit to do his best, and the one serious worry that clouded his horizon concerned the problem of Peterson's college career. At length there came this brief and business-like note from Mr. Thomas Winthrop Meserve, Sr.:

My dear Boy:

Yours received and contents noted. I approve of your attitude in the case of H. Peterson. I saw at once that discretion was required. Arrangements have been made so that he will be able to discharge his obligations and stay in college. You are in no way involved. In fact, he will have no clues whatever. I expect to see you at the game in Elmsford. Good luck.

Your Affectionate Father.

"What a corker of a pater he is," said Tom to himself. "And I used to be afraid of him. How in the world did he manage to mend Peterson's fortunes, with nobody the wiser? Now, by Jove! I have nothing to do but pitch the game of my life."

CHAPTER XVIII

WINNING THE CHAMPIONSHIP

THE Elmsford field was a bright holiday spectacle when ten thousand people, massed in tiers along three sides of the diamond, waited for the beginning of the Commencement game with Markham. Over the green turf danced a unique procession of reunion classes of alumni, arrayed in fantastic uniforms of the most extraordinary patterns and colors. A dozen brass bands were playing at once, and behind them capered weaving lines of gondoliers, sky-blue Dutchmen in wooden shoes, bare-kneed, plaided Highlanders, clowns, and Japanese in gaudy kimonos. At home, these clamorous lunatics were rated as valuable citizens of the utmost respectability, but here their sentiments were aptly focused in the legend of a banner which tossed on high amid the jumble of motion and color:

WE LOVE OUR FAMILIES
And
WE LOVE OUR BUSINESS!
But
OH!! YOU DECENNIAL
REUNION!

In the front row of seats of the most favorably situated grand-stand was a little party, consisting of two gentlemen of middle age, a sweet-faced woman of like years, a slender girl of so much beauty that passing undergraduates turned to look at her, and a tanned, broad-shouldered, youngish man of sterling, rough-and-ready appearance who held himself like a veteran soldier.

"How does it feel to be the mother of a 'varsity pitcher?" Helen Rockwell asked of her chaperon. "I have the advantage of you. I have seen him play before."

"My nerves are a-twitter," confessed Mrs. Meserve. "I think that I have not fully realized what it meant to Tom until I saw this great, tumultuous crowd to-day. Yes, he has finished his Sophomore year, and I have never seen him play base-ball, Helen."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but this crowd can't rattle him," spoke up Sergeant Jack Hogan. "You ought to ha' seen the four hundred man-eaters present when he pitched for the Quarter-boats against the Sand-Fleas. There *was* a real game of ball."

"Oh! I am so thankful that I knew nothing about it," sighed the mother of Thomas.

"It is just a year ago since the lad and I were bunkies in the first camp we struck," said Hogan. "Saints alive! Who'd ha' thought I'd be up here

now as a guest of the family of the 'varsity pitcher, T. W. Meserve, Jr.?"

"What has become of the other men of that famous nine of yours?" asked Mr. Saunders Rockwell.

"I have framed up a bit of a surprise for the boy," observed the sergeant. "When you and Mr. Meserve were kind enough to invite me to come North for this game, we had just finished the Long Key Viaduct job, and men were being laid off right and left. A bunch of 'em came up from Key West in the same steamer with me. Five of the old Quarter-boat ball team were there, and they all had rolls of money that was scorchin' their pockets. So I fetched 'em along to Elmsford for the sake of shakin' hands with Thomas, and mighty glad they were to come.

"I could get no grand-stand seats, so they are on the bleachers yonder, Tim McFarland, Shorty Jenks, Bill Harper, Eddie Frost, and Big Mike Webster. You will sure hear their 'college cheer' before the game goes far. I hope the umpire is a fair man. One rank decision and those husky lads will be spillin' out on the field."

"Ah, here comes our boy," exclaimed Mr. Meserve, and he rose to his feet and unconsciously gripped his wife's shoulder as the Elmsford team trotted nimbly across the diamond, and scattered for practice. Helen Rockwell was leaning forward, her lips

parted, her eyes all for the tall young pitcher with the mop of flaxen hair, who lingered behind his comrades and waved his cap to her with an impulsive, boyish gesture.

Above the confused noise of cheering and of brass bands going it for all they were worth, came a hurricane chant from the bleachers:

QUARTER-BOATS FOREVER!

WE EAT 'EM ALIVE!

"What do you think of my five strong men? Their voices are as big as their appetites," murmured Hogan, but nobody heard him.

Soon the Markham team took the field for practice, and Tom Meserve and his fellows walked to the bench. The crack Elmsford pitcher was outwardly calm, but his pulse beat fast. One game, the first of the series with Markham, had been won by Tom and his partners after ten innings of hard fighting. A victory to-day would clinch the championship for Elmsford and avert playing off a tie. Tom Meserve had been somewhat agitated by the presence of his sweetheart and his parents, but the unexpected war-cry of the Quarter-boats had braced his nerves taut and filled him with a do-or-die spirit that would endure to the last gasp.

He stood watching the Markham players run

bases and field the balls batted from the home plate when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and he turned to face his former rival, Harry Peterson. They smiled at each other and Peterson said earnestly:

"I wish I were in your shoes, but you have earned the right to face the music to-day."

"Thank you, old man," replied Tom. "But Elmsford would have a better chance if you were in the box. I want you to meet my folks, after the game."

"I should be delighted, Meserve, but I must chase after my Uncle Tim. He is here with a gang of old Quarter-boat men, and he will try to give me the slip. He thinks I ought not to recognize him—wired me from New York to meet him at the hotel under cover of darkness, or some such blessed foolishness."

"I'd be proud to parade across the campus with him, behind a brass band," cried Tom. "Never mind, we'll grab the whole outfit after the game, and don't you let Tim McFarland escape, whatever you do."

"I promise to capture him, if I have to call in the police," was the nephew's ultimatum. "Hello, the game is due to begin."

The crucial moment had come, the umpire was dusting the home plate with his cap, and Tom Meserve walked slowly toward the pitcher's station.

A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and he turned to face his former rival

"Steady, dependable, and consistently strong," the newspaper critics had called him, and while the Elmsford coaches viewed him as their handiwork. something might be said for the part played by John Hogan, late sergeant of the Ninth United States Infantry.

Certain it was that the Elmsford pitcher was less disturbed than his father, his mother, and the girl who loved him. In his heart he knew that he was by no means as anxious as when he had beheld the terrible Terry Flynn swagger to the plate. Indeed, his pitching was more formidable against these carefully trained collegians than it had proved in conflict with the motley collection of Sand-Fleas. Skilful coaching had done much for him, but more than this, he had a solid quality of self-confidence, bred of his unusual experiences afield and afloat. He was a veteran of more arduous contests than the campus and its life could offer.

In truth, it would be somewhat of an anticlimax to relate in all its details the progress of this college game, thrilling and heroic though it was, for it lacked the danger to life and limb of that memorable battle on the base-ball grounds of Key West, and the umpire who swayed the fates of Elmsford and Markham was as safe as if he had been in his own home. No sooner had he pitched the first inning than Tom was proof against stage-fright, and he

paid no heed to the distractions of the bands and the cheering.

Life could hold no greater prize for one-and-twenty than to be pitching winning ball for one's 'varsity colors on this brave day of June, but after all, the plaudits of the multitude of undergraduates and alumni were no more welcome than the hoarse, "Well done, boy! Eat 'em alive!" that boomed across the field from the explosive group of old "Quarter-boats." And, better even than this, in the grand-stand sat the fairest of the fair, Helen Rockwell, come to behold her gallant knight acquit himself as valiantly for her dear sake as in the days when he was a "tarrier" bold, and she was the beleaguered princess of an enchanted isle. The ogre, in the person of Mr. Saunders Rockwell, also looked on and applauded, but he was now a benevolent ogre, who was immensely proud of his son-in-law to be.

The game was of a kind to stir the blood, with its breathless moments and crises that hung in the balance through one inning after another. In the end, however, Elmsford, pluck, luck, and the flawless, cool-headed work of the pitcher wrested the victory and the championship from that ancient and honorable foe, Markham University.

After Thomas Winthrop Meserve had escaped from the frenzied throng which carried him around the field upon whatever shoulders could press nearest

to him, he climbed into the grand-stand and greeted his beaming dear ones, who were waiting to tell him what a wonderful man he was, and how proud they were to be able to claim him.

"I will ride into town in your hack," he said to his mother. "I don't want to lose you and Helen for a minute. I can shift my clothes in a jiffy. There was high-class company around the field to see your hobo play ball to-day. Wasn't it great? Are you glad I came back to college, Helen?"

"Indeed I am, with all my heart, Tom. But I'm awfully glad that you ran away from college for a while. How else could I have ever found my fugitive Freshman?"

"And to think how near I came to blighting the career of this glorious young hero with a dose of buckshot," chimed in Mr. Saunders Rockwell. "Well, Sergeant Hogan, some of the congratulations belong to you. It was a lucky day for all concerned when you abducted this addle-pated undergraduate."

Just then Howard Craig came charging across the field in a great hurry and announced, when within hailing distance:

"Say, Tom, five very sturdy-looking persons are waiting at the gate and clamoring to see you. They will be storming the dressing-rooms if you do not get a move on yourself. Pardon me, but no one else can pacify them in the least."

"All right, Howard. You were ever the faithful room-mate," laughed Thomas. "Those are not creditors this time. They must be the Quarter-boats. Come along, Hogan. I will meet you at the gate, folks."

The loyal delegation from the Florida keys raised a huzza at sight of their old comrade and pitcher, and Tim McFarland, as spokesman, declaimed:

"It was crackin' good ball, Thomas, but it struck us as kind of tame after the game we dished up when that plug-ugly, Mitchell, hammered home his decisions with the big end of a bat. And for entertainment rich and rare, did this holiday show touch the sight of that Cuban umpire skimmin' through the gate with his coat-tails standing straight out?"

"Right you are, Tim," joyously exclaimed Thomas. "I want you boys to be my guests for dinner to-night. I have a party of my own, but I can join you a bit late. And my room-mate, Howard Craig, and that fine nephew of yours, Harry Peterson, will see that you get started right. Hogan wants to join you, too."

There were murmurs to right and left of Tim McFarland, who protested:

"Thank you, Tom, but we have been planning to blow *you* off. We are the hosts for to-night. The table is already engaged in the swellest joint we could find in Elmsford, and a dago orchestra is chartered

all ship-shape. We have plenty of coin. Don't worry about that end of it. And we owe you this small stunt for what you did in winning that game of ball from Terry Flynn. Isn't that right, boys?"

"Sure thing," said the Quarter-boats in chorus.

Touched and pleased beyond measure, Thomas gracefully yielded, and his thanks were straight from the heart. Before he left them to rejoin his own party, he was called aside by Tim McFarland, who whispered very earnestly:

"About me being uncle to Harry Peterson. Forget it, understand? The boy doesn't deserve any such hard luck. Keep it dark from the college lads. He was here a bit ago and went off to find a hack for us. But I won't let him ride in it. Take the tip and oblige me, will you, Tom—for old times' sake."

Thomas laughed, but his eyes glistened as he grasped Tim's hand and stoutly declared:

"Ashamed of you? Nonsense! Why, I intend to claim you as a long-lost uncle of my own at the dinner to-night. You will never catch Harry Peterson agreeing to any such silly notion as keeping you in the background. He is not that kind."

With this Tom ran after his parents, present and future, and was promptly accosted by his father, who said, with an alarming frown:

"I shall ask Sergeant Hogan to escort your Quarter-boat friends into town, and Howard Craig will

ride back with you and me, Thomas. The ladies will be deprived of your illustrious society until we meet at the hotel. I have something very particular to say to you."

Much disturbed at being separated from Helen, yet with a good year's record to fortify his conscience, Thomas obeyed, wondering what sort of paternal lecture could be impending. Howard Craig had joined them, as if he had been notified of a plot, and as the carriage moved away from the field, Mr. Meserve solemnly explained:

"I regret to have to cloud this festive occasion, my son, but the time has come for a secret to be revealed. Craig has known it, and faithfully kept quiet through your Sophomore year, at my request."

"It has nothing to do with Helen, has it?" sputtered Thomas. "I took it for granted that the past was cleared up long ago. Please don't keep me on the anxious seat. My college record is spotless. Thanks to my receiver, I do not owe a dollar, and I have passed all my examinations for Junior year."

"Yes, it intimately concerns your college record," his father affirmed. "Thomas, when you ran away from Elmsford, I had not the slightest idea of what put you up to it."

The son stared with an expression of dazed, ludicrous astonishment. "You mean to tell me that you never read the two volumes of 'The World's Great-

est Orators'?" cried he. "You did not discover the awful catalogue of my crimes tucked away in one of them?"

"No, Thomas. I have a rather awkward confession of my own to make. I had already purchased a set of the books, and I presented your copies to a friend, without cutting the leaves. You had forgotten to inscribe the title-page."

"And the friend never gave me away, father? He must be a good sport, whoever he is."

"A doubtful compliment, Thomas. He happens to be the pastor of my church in Cleveland. I chanced to telegraph you that I was coming on to Elmsford to make you a little visit, and when I arrived you had taken to your heels. Howard Craig was very loyal and diplomatic and tried his best to shield you, but I wormed the truth from him. It was all quite absurd, was it not?"

"Absurd! It is the last straw," disgustedly exclaimed the youth. "Howard, you are a double-dealing scoundrel."

"Oh, you don't know me," chuckled Howard. "The richest part is yet to come. Your father paid all your debts, settled with every Elmsford creditor on the spot."

Thomas fairly roared:

"Then Howard has been obtaining money under false pretences. He is a crooked receiver. He

ought to be in jail. Here I have been pauperized through Sophomore year—allowed a beggarly dollar a week pocket-money. How about my wages—my savings-bank account that I turned over to you, Howard, to be spread among my creditors?"

"I put it back in the savings-bank for you," blandly explained Craig. "And besides that, I have saved a thousand dollars out of your allowance. Your father thinks I am a pretty deft little receiver, and has offered me a position after graduation on the strength of it."

"But why have I been buncoed and deceived in this shameless manner?" Thomas demanded.

"I suggested to your father that it might be a good scheme to keep you guessing through this year," was Craig's complacent answer. "You are away ahead of the game financially, and you ought to give me a vote of thanks. But you are an ungrateful pup."

"Craig broke your debts to me very gently," put in the father of the victimized Sophomore. "Then he unfolded the receivership plan, and it displayed such a lucid gleam of business intelligence on your part, Thomas, that I was ready to make terms of peace with you then and there. But you were not there, you know."

"Whew! then I have about twelve hundred dollars of my very own," cried Tom, who was suddenly

diverted by this pleasing result of the conspiracy. "Say, father, I forgive you for playing such a trick on your only son. As for Craig, I shall first compel him to disgorge, and then I shall proceed to punch his head. Gracious! I am almost rich enough to set up housekeeping. Wait until Helen hears this news!"

"Nonsense!" chided Mr. Meserve. "You will be only changing receivers when Helen takes charge of you, and I am satisfied that she will be as sensible as Howard Craig. By the way, perhaps you would like to know how I arranged young Peterson's affairs?"

"Indeed, I am crazy to hear all about it," replied Thomas. "It was simply splendid of you."

Mr. Meserve surveyed his son with affectionate pride and answered:

"It is sometimes convenient to be the president of one bank and a director of several others. I was able to ascertain, by means of confidential inquiries, in which of the banks of Elmsford Harry Peterson kept an account, and whose signature was on the checks deposited by him. The name discovered, I consulted a directory of Elmsford graduates, and thus found the whereabouts of the person in question. Without appearing in the matter, I refunded to him, through an agent of mine, the total amount that had been received by Peterson from that source."

"How clever of you," said the admiring son.

"Now, will you take my note for the amount and let me pay it off with what I can save during the next two years?"

"No, my son. Some time you can tell Peterson all about it, and let him know that the loan is to stand until he is ready to pay it off—five, ten, or fifteen years after graduation, without interest, of course."

"Then I wish to lend him my twelve hundred dollars to help pay his way through Junior and Senior years, father. Will you help me work out the best scheme to make him accept it?"

"With pleasure, Thomas. Peterson is the kind of man who deserves your friendship and mine. Bring him around to see me at the hotel to-morrow morning. He was ready to make a great sacrifice for principle, and the world has none too many men of that stamp."

"He comes of Quarter-boat stock," suggested the happy Tom. "And you cannot beat it, sir, in a tight corner."

CHAPTER XIX

FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE

THE dinner given by the veterans of the Quarter-boat nine was delayed until the arrival of Tom Meserve, who found the ladies only too willing to excuse him from lingering with them at the hotel. After all, it was right to share him with his comrades tried and true who had helped to stamp him with the hallmark of a manhood which neither wealth, education, nor social station could have given him. He was welcomed by the jovial, ruddy Quarter-boats with their battle anthem, which fairly rattled the windows of the café whose most ornate dining-room had been reserved for the night, and expense be hanged. Tim McFarland, his coat flung over a chair, led the orchestra with a champagne bottle as a baton, and Tom was escorted to the head of the table to the rousing strains of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow, Which Nobody Can Deny." As soon as the worthy Tim rested from his labors as master of ceremonies, he confided to Thomas:

"My nephew, Harry Peterson, would insist on butting in, understand? But as long as the jollifi-

cation is just between ourselves, the college lads will not get wise to his having such a battered old tarrier for an uncle."

Peterson stepped between them and exclaimed, as if he were scolding a noisy boy:

"Another word of that foolishness, and we'll prove who is the better man. You are as hard as nails, I know, Uncle Tim, but I will bet that I can put you on your back."

"Shame on ye! I'll heave the two of you through the window if you don't behave," interjected Sergeant Jack Hogan, and he looked equal to the undertaking. "One of you ought to be as proud of the other one as the other is—pshaw, I'm comin' out of the same hole I went in. We are all good pals together, eh, Thomas Winthrop?"

There promptly followed a concerted attack on the elaborate menu which amazed the café waiters, accustomed though they were to the vigorous appetites of the undergraduate patrons.

"Disguisin' all this grub with fancy French names makes it a giddy gamble," cheerfully observed Shorty Jenks. "Every course is like filling your hand after the draw. You don't know what cards you will hold."

"Stand pat, Shorty," advised Tim McFarland. "You can't lose. Let your belt out a notch or two. Long Key was never like this."

The speech-making was early and impromptu. Every man had a yarn to tell of the "big job" among the blue lagoons and shimmering coral reefs, and the famous base-ball game at Key West had to be played over again, inning by inning. In the midst of the joyous racket, the members of the victorious Elmsford nine tramped into the room, and were introduced all round by the delighted Thomas. Tim McFarland was dismayed, and frantically signalled his nephew to disown him entirely, but Harry Peterson only grinned and bided his time.

The robust and wholesome young men of the college campus and the toilers from the Florida keys amiably fraternized without delay, nor was it long before cheer was answering cheer, and the Quarter-boats were shouting to the world at large that should any foe assail the lads of Elmsford they were prepared to "eat 'em alive!" At length, Tim McFarland whispered to Hogan, who rose, glass in hand, and said, with a dignity that became him exceedingly well:

"We are all good comrades and good sports together to-night. I have a toast to propose. And you young gentlemen who played such clean and speedy ball for your college this afternoon will understand, and you will be glad to join us. Let us drink, standing and in silence, to the two men of the Quarter-boat nine who went down with old

Number Ten. They were thoroughbreds, and they died game. The team is disbanded, God bless her! But here's to the souls of Hodges and Flaherty."

The Elmsford men were upon their feet in an instant. Here was something as true and strong and fine in its way as the college spirit that was so very vital to them. Their youthful eyes dwelt with frank admiration upon these simple, stalwart, unlettered toilers who had diced with death and were unafraid of life. Tom Meserve comprehended their feelings and smiled to himself, for thus had Sergeant Jack Hogan appealed to him when they had crossed each other's paths in New York.

The captain of the 'varsity nine responded briefly. He was a better second baseman than orator.

"We thank you for allowing us to drink that toast with you, gentlemen of the Quarter-boat nine. It is an honor and a privilege. Meserve has told us a great deal about you. And we are very glad that an Elmsford man, and a Freshman at that, had the stuff in him to make good with you. A long cheer, fellows, for our hosts."

No sooner was the room comparatively quiet than Harry Peterson was making straight for Tim McFarland, whom he collared by force of arms and dragged protesting toward the head of the table. It looked, for a moment, as if the elder kinsman might escape, but Tom Meserve and Sergeant Hogan

blocked the exit, and the prisoner, very sheepish and ruffled, had to stand mute and helpless while Peterson announced:

"I want you fellows to know that here is the best Quarter-boat of them all—my uncle, Mr. Timothy McFarland, and I am tremendously glad of the chance to claim him as one of us."

Poor Tim was angrily muttering behind his hand, "You ought not to ha' done it, boy," but every man of the Elmsford team was wishing that he owned an uncle of this heroic mould, and most of them were saying so at the top of their voices.

"Perhaps we can persuade him to sign a contract to coach the Elmsford nine next year," shouted the 'varsity captain.

McFarland was blushing to the ears and wiping his eyes with a tanned fist. The ovation was so genuine, so overwhelming, that he could find no words to say what was in his heart. To cover his confusion, Tom Meserve crowded to the front and addressed his comrades of the campus.

"You thought that Harry Peterson ought not to have quit playing ball. You believed it would have been more loyal of him to stick by the team. You were mistaken. I know better, and so does Mr. Tim McFarland. He did the square thing, and he is the kind of man we want at Elmsford."

A little later Peterson managed to whisper to Tom:

"Don't leave town until I can see you again, will you? All my affairs have been straightened out most wonderfully, and I am coming back to college next year. You are somehow at the bottom of it all. I feel sure of it."

"S-s-s-h! Not a word. It was none of my doing," smiled Tom. "But my father expects to meet you at the hotel in the morning. All's well that ends well. And you deserve all the good luck in the world, old man."

The 'varsity captain was clamoring to be heard. He stood upon a chair and declaimed amid thunderous applause:

"A toast to our pitcher, your pitcher, to the finest man and the best athlete in college. Here's to Tom Meserve!"

"'Tis worth ten years of my life to hear it said," murmured Sergeant John Hogan. "He has earned his promotion, and I thank God for having steered him my way."

THE END.